

THE INDEPENDENT

Wednesday 4 February 1998 45p No 3,525

Murdoch faces global tax inquiry, but Blair backs him

Exclusive: Move against tycoon as ministers prepare to defend his British interests in the Lords

A SECRET international task force of investigators has been set up to examine why Rupert Murdoch's News Corp pays virtually no tax. The unprecedented move against the Murdoch empire comes as ministers prepare to go into battle to defend the media baron's British interests.

An agreement to launch the inquiry, involving tax investigators from Britain, America, Canada and Australia was reached at a secret meeting in Sydney in December. The authorities are concerned that Mr Murdoch's companies pay a fraction of the taxes paid by his competitors in the cut-throat media business.

At the same time, however, *The Independent* has learned that Tony Blair has ordered total retreat from any government confrontation with Mr Murdoch over his aggressive pursuit of a price war in the newspaper industry.

Reneging on pre-election pledges, Labour peers have been ordered to oppose an all-party attempt to curb Mr Murdoch's power in a crucial House of Lords vote next Monday.

The amendment, tabled with all-par-

By Steve Boggan and Anthony Bevins

lands, the Dutch Antilles and Bermuda. By the time the money had finished its journey, a loss was recorded in Australia, greatly reducing its overall tax bill.

In the United Kingdom, News International, the UK arm of News Corp, which owns the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Sunday Times* and the *News of the World*, recorded profits of almost £1bn between 1985 and 1995. An *Independent* investigation revealed that the group paid just £11.74m tax – a rate of just 1.2 per cent. At the time, corporation tax was levied at 33 per cent.

The avoidance methods used by Mr Murdoch's accountants are legal, but there is a political and moral groundswell of opinion which believes News Corp's tax burden should reflect its profits.

"No one is happy with the way Mr Murdoch is behaving," said a source close to the investigation. "The [investigators] are querying whether he legitimately makes a loss or not. A plan has been put into place to tackle his empire."

However, unless taxation systems can be unified internationally, it is not clear what the authorities can do. News Corp's avoidance methodology involves inter-company loans, the use of subsidiaries in off-shore tax havens and the tax-relief granted on interest on loan repayments – some of which the task force will want to examine. All such methods, however, are quite legal.

"The problem the tax authorities have with Murdoch is that he has all the facts about everything in his empire but if you are an investigator in the UK, you can only find out about the UK business; if you are an investigator in the US, then you can only look at the US end," said the source.

"The purpose of this meeting was to break across that boundary and share information to try and match [the investigators'] knowledge with his."

All Labour peers have been ordered to vote against it on Monday, and Lord Simon of Highbury, Minister Trade and Competitiveness, has said that the Government will not depart from a European "model" on tackling abuse of market power. But Cabinet sources have told the *Independent* that the order had "come down" from No 10 that nothing was to be done to disturb or interfere with the newspaper proprietors. Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, has been told to maintain a "hands-off" approach.

If the official Opposition backs the Government, or abstains, it is unlikely that the Murdoch amendment can be carried in the Lords – or upheld in the Commons.



Rupert Murdoch: News International, his UK company, pays just 1.2 per cent in tax Photograph: LPI

Davis quits as new lottery doubts emerge

Exclusive

By Kim Sengupta

PETER DAVIS's reign as Britain's first lottery regulator ended with his resignation last night after a stormy four-hour meeting with the Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture.

It followed the widespread condemnation of his behaviour as regulator following the Richard Branson libel case. The deputy director general, John Stoker, would take over Mr Davis's duties while a new director general was found.

The resignation came as details emerged which suggested that he misled a House of Commons committee over the vetting of American businessmen bidding for the lottery licence. His claims to MPs that complete and comprehensive background checks had been made by specialist agencies have been denied.

Just a few weeks before Peter Davis awarded the lottery in May 1994 to the consortium Camelot, involving the controversial US company GfG, he approached an international detective agency to carry out confidential checks on 100 people.

The agency, Kroll Associates, said it would take at least three months to undertake such an examination. However, they quoted a price of £3,000 per person. A little later they were told on behalf of Mr Davis that the checks had been carried out by the FBI.

Giving evidence before the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee in December 1995, Mr Davis repeated that he had received "information from the FBI". He also said he had received "permission from the FBI to

name them as a source for information".

Yesterday a spokesman at the FBI headquarters in Washington DC stated they have no record of any checks being carried out on behalf of the Office of National Lottery or Peter Davis, or any information being passed on to these parties. Nor could he find any record of Mr Davis being given permission to tell third parties that the FBI were sources of information.

A spokesman said: "I cannot find any record of a request of that from either Peter Davis, the Office of National Lottery or others acting on their behalf. Nor can I find any record of him being given permission to say we have been supplying him with information."

Mr Davis said he had hired two outside investigators, Control Risks and Hill Samuel, to carry out some checks, and it was Control Risks who were involved in the crucial question of ascertaining the fitness and propriety of would be lottery operators. Control Risks said last night it had carried out work for Oflot on publicly available database. Sources in the company said it had not carried out a comprehensive check.

The Public Affairs Committee stated that Peter Davis made "serious errors of judgement" over his links with GfG before he awarded the contract.

Profile, page 2

A tangled tax web, p2

ty support from Labour and Tory peers, would outlaw, "any conduct on the part of one or more national newspaper undertakings... if it may reduce the diversity of the national newspaper press in the United Kingdom by reducing, retarding, injuring or eliminating competition".

The amendment directly targets the predatory price-cutting operations of the *Times*; clearly designed to damage vulnerable, or less wealthy, competitors like *The Independent* and *Daily Telegraph*.

It is understood that the secret meeting of tax investigators was called by the Australian authorities, who have been unhappy about Mr Murdoch's level of tax payments since the 1980s. Although he renounced his Australian nationality in order to become an American citizen in the mid-1980s – allowing him to own American television interests – his company is still based in Australia.

Last year, while other international media groups, such as Walt Disney Corporation, paid up to 28 per cent of their income in tax, News Corp reported paying \$103m (£62.42m) on operating profits of \$1.32bn (£800m) world-wide, a rate of just 7.8 per cent.

In 1989, an Australian parliamentary investigation found that News Corp had routed all its profits through subsidiaries in low-tax countries like the Cayman Is-

Grim routine played out as woman steels herself for death chamber

THE EXECUTION set for last night of Karla Faye Tucker was to be just like any other at Huntsville Penitentiary: there would be no fuss just because she was a woman. That is, according to Governor George Bush and to officials of the prison yesterday.

True and not true. There was no change to the grim – and, to the prison officers, familiar – timetable governing the last minutes of the convict's life. But, for the first time on an execution night, the city's main Episcopal church was to hold a special service at the hour of Tucker's dispatch. And a local bar, two blocks from the prison, had plans for a post-Karla karaoke party last night.

From David Osborne in Huntsville, Texas

Two telephone lines were kept open to the prison all day yesterday. One was from the US Supreme Court, which last night refused to block Tucker's execution. The second fed directly to the office of Governor Bush in Austin, the state capital.

State officials said that Governor Bush had been awaiting final word from the court before deciding whether to exercise his only option to order a one-time 30-day stay. At the weekend, he received a videotaped message from Tucker pleading with him for a reprieve. He has also been inundated by some 2,400 letters asking for clemency.

Few of the letters, however, had come from Texans and political pressure to act was marginal. Tucker's case, the Governor had already stated, should "be treated like any other".



Tucker: Pleading for her life

Thus, at about 4pm local time yesterday Tucker was to be taken to a 10ft by 6ft holding cell in the bungalow-type structure that is the execution building inside the Huntsville facilities. There she was to eat her last meal and receive two 30-minute visits, from a spiritual adviser and from her lawyer. Shortly before

the appointed hour of 6pm, she was to be walked to the death chamber itself and asked to lie down on the trolley so that intravenous drips could be connected to her arms.

Only once in the 55 executions he has witnessed has there been any trouble in persuading convicts to lie down, said Larry Fitzgerald a prison spokesman. "Everyone else has actually hopped on to the gurney."

The killing of Tucker was to take roughly two minutes, with three substances being injected in quick succession – an anaesthetic to put her to sleep, a muscle relaxant to collapse her lungs and finally a lethal cocktail to stop the heart.

Unlike the firing squad or electric chair, death by injection offers little by way of spectacle; nothing, in fact, except for a sudden, and usually quite noisy gushing of air from the condemned's mouth as the lungs fold in on themselves.

Free phone calls if you can bear the ads

By Chris Godmark

THE days of the telephone bill could soon be numbered, with the launch of a service offering customers unlimited access to free phone calls. The only catch is that every few minutes callers have to break off to listen to an advertisement, an innovation which its backers believe could be the ultimate direct marketing weapon.

Energis, the fast-growing phone network, completed a trial of the service before Christmas and is considering going live in a few months time. "This is direct advertising with a vengeance. The customer gets instant gratification," said Alistair Henderson from the company.

The idea, which originated in Sweden a year ago, is deceptively simple. Customers call a freephone number, then key in the phone number they want to dial. The call begins with an advert for anything from local businesses to high street store chains. The longer

subscribers stay on the line, the more adverts they are subjected to, preceded by a warning tone. Energis declined to reveal the companies taking part in the trial, but one possibility was a recorded message from a pizza parlour which would ask customers to press the keypad if they were feeling hungry. When they hang up, the pizza chain would automatically call them back to take the order.

Though customers have no idea which advert will come up, they are questioned before they join the scheme to find out their age and interests. You might get an advert for wine if you are a wine lover, and then an airline saying they've got cheap seats available.

Energis says the scheme is an alternative to direct mail sent through the post and frequently thrown straight into the bin.

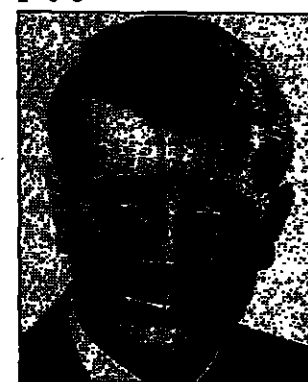
I.Q. of 145 and Can't Remember?

A FAMOUS international publisher reports that there is a simple technique for acquiring a powerful memory which can pay you real dividends in both business and social advancement. It works like magic to give you added poise, self-confidence and greater popularity.

The details of this method are described in his fascinating booklet, "Adventures in Memory", sent free on request.

According to this publisher, many people do not realise how much they can influence others simply by remembering accurately everything they see, hear or read. Whether in business, at social functions, or even in casual conversation with new acquaintances, there are ways in which you can dominate each situation simply by your ability to remember.

For example, you need never forget another appointment – ever! You can learn names, faces, facts, figures and foreign languages faster than you ever thought possible. Whole books and plays can be indelibly imprinted on your memory after a single reading. You could be more successful in your studies and examinations. At parties and dinners you may never again be at a loss for appropriate words or entertaining stories. In fact, you could be



Forget facts, figures?

more poised and self-confident in everything you say and do. These are only a few of the ways in which you can benefit by possessing a trained memory.

To acquaint all readers of *The Independent* with the easy-to-follow rules for developing skill in remembering, we, the publishers, have printed full details of this interesting self-training method in a fascinating booklet, "Adventures in Memory", sent free on request. No obligation. No salesman will call. Just fill in and return the coupon on Page 12 (you don't even need to stamp your envelope), or write to: Memory and Concentration Studies, (Dept. IDM88), FREEPOST 198, Manchester M60 3DL.



Branson in call for creation of no-profit People's Lottery

Richard Branson last night called for the dissolution of the Camelot consortium and the establishment of a new National Lottery. He spoke to Andrew Buncombe following his libel battle victory against Guy Snowden and the resignation of the lottery regulator Peter Davis.

More people would play the lottery if it was not run for profit, evidence brought in the libel case had demonstrated, Mr Branson said last night, and suggested it should be renamed the People's Lottery. "The Government had pledged to operate the lottery for no profit. I hope that any backtracking that may have gone on will come to an end. I think that naming it the People's Lottery would give it a fresh start."

He feels that in order to restore public faith there must be a fundamental overhaul of the lottery's operation. "Yesterday [Monday] both the regulator, Peter Davis, and Camelot misled

the public by saying this was an argument between two individuals. That was not the case. GTEch were found as guilty as Mr Snowden. If Mr Snowden has to resign then GTEch has to step down as well," he said.

"It may be easier, and there is enough ground for doing so, to take the shareholders away altogether, get rid of Camelot and for a period of time let the staff continue to operate it."

"I think to restore public faith GTEch has to go and it may be as well to get rid of all the shareholders and dissolve the Camelot consortium."

Snacking on toast and Marmite in the drawing room of his offices in west London, Mr Branson repeated that he no longer wanted to run the lottery. "I still believe that what I do is set up companies, get good people in and get things running. I would be delighted to help, but personally I don't feel they need me. There are plenty of very good people around the world and whether I am involved or not is really an irrelevance."

He said he had been convinced that if the lottery was to continue to be a success the regulator, Peter Davis, had to

stand down. "Mr Davis put out a statement saying what I had said was untrue. I honestly didn't think he could stay on."

Mr Branson said that during the libel trial, which he had initiated against Mr Snowden after the American businessman denied trying to bribe him to drop his bid to run the National Lottery for no profit, he had suffered from a "bad press" campaign launched by his detractors.

"Was it a coincidence that on the first day of the trial all these private letters between myself and Elton John should suddenly appear?" he said. "There is no doubt that things were being fed to journalists."

Mr Branson, 47, who is to donate his £100,000 damages to charity, said he was used to the backlash his gestures sometimes brought. "There is no question the times I have been criticised in my life have been for doing things not to make money but to help the community. If I simply set up companies to make lots of money people would not mind." But he said when the criticism stood in the way of what he was trying to do, it was "very annoying".



Final showdown: Peter Davis arriving to meet Chris Smith yesterday Photograph: Reuters

Crisis meeting as lottery regulator fights to keep job

Peter Davis the lottery regulator resigned last night after a four hour meeting with the Culture Secretary, Chris Smith. Kim Sengupta looks at the trials and tribulations of Britain's first lottery regulator.

Peter Davis, they were saying at Whitehall yesterday, had been looking into an abyss, and Chris Smith finally pushed him over. The lottery regulator had gone to meet Mr Smith in a mood of defiance, refusing to resign despite widespread opprobrium over his handling of bribery allegations involving Camelot. As a Commons motion was tabled saying he should go, he maintained: "I am doing the job I was given to do. I will continue to do that job."

His £84,000-a-year contract had been due to expire in October, and even if he had not resigned yesterday it is thought highly unlikely that it would have been renewed. Either way, the career country's first lottery regulator has come to an inglorious end.

Mr Davis's first and most important job was to decide who were fit and proper persons to

run the lottery, but now he has been deemed unable to regulate it. More than 30 years ago Mr Davis was sixth in the country's accountancy exams, but since then he has been closely involved with two of Britain's biggest business failures, Harris Queensway and Lloyd's.

It was therefore something of a surprise when he was named as lottery regulator, and there was further surprise and anger about some of his actions while in the post. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee decided Mr Davis had made "serious errors of judgement" in his relationship with GTEch, a US partner of the consortium Camelot to whom he awarded the contract.

While he was deciding on the award Mr Davis accepted five free flights from the company, against Whitehall advice, during a business trip to the States in 1994. He explained that he was saving taxpayers' money. The committee also criticised Mr Davis for a social visit to New York financier Carl Menges, the boss of an investment house which has a major stake in GTEch, although it accepted the two men's wives were long-standing friends.

PAC member Alan Williams last night put down a Commons motion asking him to resign.

Murdoch's juggling outwits taxmen around the world

An international task force of tax investigators from at least four countries is attempting to unravel Rupert Murdoch's labyrinthine business affairs in a bid to make him pay more tax. Steve Boggan shows how the Murdoch media empire has so far been able - quite legally - to outwit the taxman.

You don't get to be the planet's biggest media mogul by being generous with your tax returns, but Rupert Murdoch makes his fellow corporate giants appear positively charitable.

A recent comparison of media empires showed that while most of his competitors paid

taxes at anything up to 32.5 per cent, Mr Murdoch's News Corp paid just 7.8 per cent worldwide.

An exhaustive investigation by *The Independent* in 1995 showed that in the previous 10 years News International, News Corp's UK arm, had paid only £11.74m tax on profits of nearly £1bn - a rate of just 1.2 per cent when corporation tax was running at 33 per cent.

In comparison, the Telegraph group had paid 29 per cent tax, the Mirror Group 20 per cent and United News and Media, owners of the Express titles, 29 per cent.

Now, however, the tax authorities internationally have had enough. *The Independent* has learnt that senior revenue investigators from the United States, the UK, Australia and Canada met in Sydney in December to examine Mr Murdoch's international network

of tax avoidance. They were stung into action by last year's results, in which News Corp reported paying worldwide taxes of \$103m (£62.42m) on operating profits of \$1.33bn (£800m), a rate of just 7.8 per cent. In a recent analysis of News Corp's taxation compared with similar media corpora-

tions, the *Washington Post* discovered a huge gap between Mr Murdoch's company payments and the rest.

The Walt Disney corporation paid 28 per cent tax. Viacom Inc, parent company of MTV and Paramount Pictures, paid 22 per cent; and Time Warner, which is similar in size

and make-up to News Corp, paid 17 per cent taxes.

So how does Mr Murdoch do it? His success in legally avoiding taxation lies in the truly global nature of his business interests. By shifting profits and losses, by making loans between companies, by claiming tax-relief on interest repay-

ments, by channelling profits through subsidiaries in offshore tax havens and by taking advantage of currency fluctuations his accountants can turn profits into apparent losses.

His empire at the end of last year comprised 789 businesses in 52 countries from Australia and Mauritius to Britain and

Cuba. In America, News Corp's portfolio includes 22 television stations, the huge Fox broadcast network and the 20th Century Fox movie studios. In the UK, it owns the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, the *Sun* and *News of the World*, and a controlling stake in BSkyB. There are also a myriad titles across five continents and a satellite network that covers much of Europe, Asia and America.

It was the breadth of Mr Murdoch's interests that prompted the Australian tax authorities to call December's meeting, during which the investigators attempted to cross the national boundaries that normally restrict their operations.

"No one is happy with the way Mr Murdoch is behaving," said a source close to the investigation. "The [investigators] are querying whether he legitimately makes a loss or not."

A plan has been put into place to tackle his empire.

The problem the tax authorities have with Murdoch is that he has all the facts about everything in his empire but if you are an investigator in the UK, you can only find out about the UK business; if you are an investigator in the US, then you can only look at the US end."

It is understood the task force will examine three ways in which News Corp manipulates its tax affairs:

- Tax relief claimed on debt interest repayments.
- The differences in accounting principles in the various countries in which tax returns are filed.
- News Corp's use of offshore tax havens. Its annual tax bill is reduced by channelling profits through subsidiaries in no-tax or low-tax havens such as the Cayman Islands.

Satellite channel announces digital TV revolution - quietly

BSkyB outlined its timetable for the digital TV revolution yesterday, but revealed little about precisely what it plans to serve up to the viewing public.

Cautiously unveiling plans for its digital satellite service yesterday, BSkyB admitted that its June launch will be a fairly modest affair.

"The meaningful launch will be in the fourth quarter," said Mark Booth, the company's chief executive, confirming that a major marketing push, to be devised by advertising agency M&C

Satchi, is scheduled for the peak Christmas sales period.

Outlining the company's interim results to the press and City analysts, Mr Booth said: "Sky's digital launch is on schedule and on budget... It will be one of the big consumer product launches of 1998 and will certainly revolutionise the way we look at television."

He added: "The savvy media players are saying this is a great moment in time and we agree." BSkyB's supreme enthused about the "near video on demand" element, which

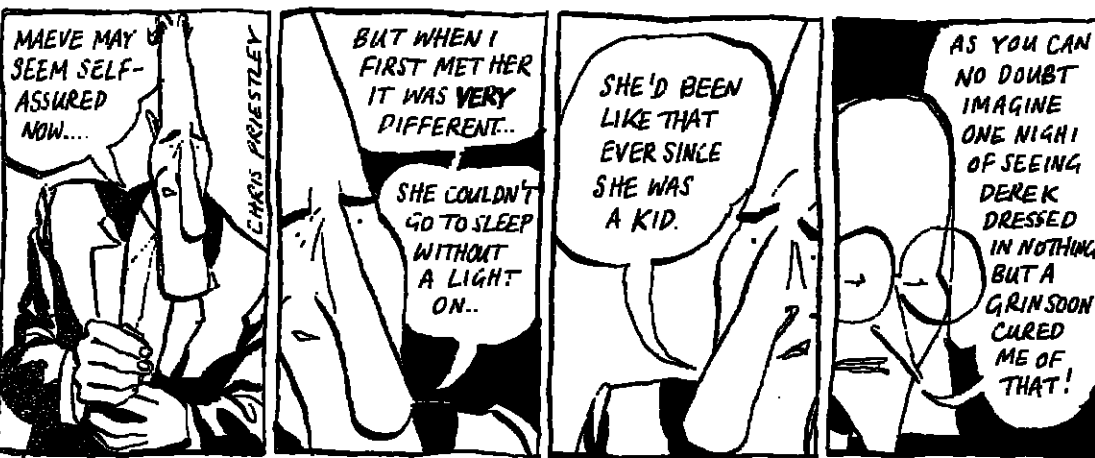
promises to bring the equivalent of a multiplex cinema into our living rooms. A selection of hit movies will be constantly replayed at 30 minute intervals, allowing digital satellite subscribers "the chance to watch what they want when they want." Interactive home shopping and home banking will also be available from June, Mr Booth said.

The first set-top boxes will hit the high street stores in June, when they are expected to retail for around £200.

— Rob Brown, Media Editor

7.30 FOR 8

by Chris Priestley ZITS



by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



CONTENTS

Home news	2-9
Foreign news	10-13
Theatre	14
Fashion	15
Features	16
Obituaries	17
Leader, letters	18
Comment	19
Business	20-23
Unit trusts	24
Sport	25-28
Crosswords	32
& The Eye	9
Games	The Eye, 9
Weather	The Eye, 10
TV and Radio	The Eye, 11, 12

demon@beck.and.call

no-one makes it easier for you to get on-line than demon, europe's no.1 independent internet service provider.

so if you need any help when you're starting up, our support line provides it, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the

year. for your free 30-day trial cd and brochure, call us on 0800 458 9666. or scribble your name and address

anywhere on this ad, then tear it out and send it to us at freepost demon (yes, that's all you have to write).

it really is that simple, only easier.

 **Demon Internet**

more people get on with us

0800 458 9666

www.demon.net email: sales@demon.net

هكذا من الأصل

Retail's future: shop until you drop, then do it again

Britain's biggest home shopping company yesterday made a £1.6bn takeover bid for Argos, the high street catalogue retailer.

The move is part of a trend towards "multi-channel" retailing under which shopping companies will target consumers using a variety of methods including high street shops, catalogues and new media such as interactive television. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, reports.

The takeover offer has come from Great Universal Stores, which is best known as a traditional operator of "big hook" catalogues such as Kay's and Choice as well as the Burberry brand of upmarket clothing.

One of the key reasons behind its Argos bid, is that GUS wants to target customers using as many different methods as possible. It is already Britain's market leader in catalogue shopping. If it succeeds in buying Argos it will control 400 shops up and down the country and be able to assemble an even better database of customers' shopping habits.

It is also in talks with television companies about selling its goods via television channels as the digital television era gets under way later this year.

"Most retailers will be multi-channel," says Lord Wolfson, chairman of GUS. "They are all simply ways of communicating with customers and giving them the widest possible choice."

Many retailers are adopting similar strategies. Asda is keen to launch its own television channel - it wants to use a QVC-style format to sell its

non-food ranges - and Littlewoods is trying to assemble a consortium of retailers to run a TV channel, possibly to coincide with the launch of digital television later this year.

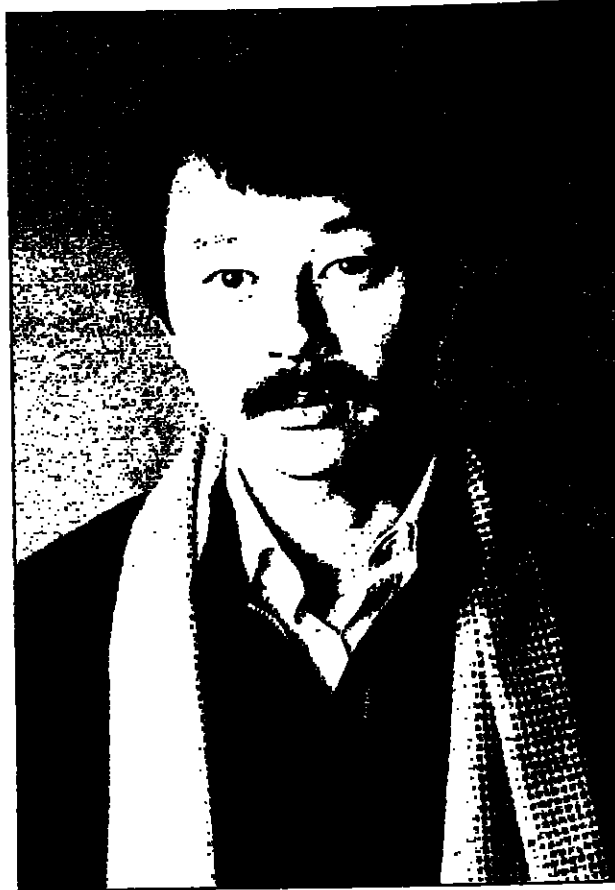
Marks & Spencer is moving into mail-order shopping with its clothing ranges. The Burton Group, which is now known as Arcadia and owns chain stores like Top Shop, Dorothy Perkins and Principles, has launched a range of catalogues for each of its main trading formats. Meanwhile a host of retailers are already successfully selling their products over the Internet.

Industry experts suggest that "cash rich, time poor" consumers will increasingly be willing to pay a little extra for the convenience of home shopping.

Argos represents a good target for a catalogue group seeking high street exposure. Its 400 shops tend to be slightly off the high street but still attract millions of shoppers with its offer of top brand names at low prices. It has a strong brand name and is also a "destination shop" for anyone seeking a new kettle or toys for Christmas. But the group has been under pressure recently as rivals have eaten away at its key markets of toys, jewellery and small electrical appliances.

Analysts have suggested that while Argos was a popular place to shop during the recession because of its low prices, some customers have been deterred by its functional shops and relatively low levels of service. Some have also criticised the system of purchasing under which customers have to fill in order forms, queue to pay and then queue again at another counter to collect the item.

Argos, meanwhile, has rejected the GUS bid as "opportunistic." It is in an awkward position as its chief executive is seriously ill and is undergoing a course of treatment.



Michael Chow portrayed: Top, Keith Haring's *Mr Chow as Green Prawn in a Bowl of Noodle* (1986); left, *Double Happiness Buddha* signed and marked with dollar signs by Andy Warhol (1982); right, photograph by Francesco Scavullo (1978)

Chow vain? Caterer to the stars celebrates a life in woks of art

Michael Chow, the restaurateur, is celebrating 30 years of serving Chinese food to celebrities by putting his valuable collection of pop-art portraits of himself on display.

Louise Jury examines how Mr Chow is depicted by Andy Warhol, David Hockney and friends.

In one of the most unusual art collections of recent times, the face of Mr Chow stares out in the distinctive styles of the artists who socialised at his eponymous restaurants.

Some were commissioned by Michael Chow himself, others really were exchanged for dinner, either in the original Knightsbridge Mr Chow or those he opened later in New York and Los Angeles. Keith Haring depicted Mr Chow as a prawn in the artist's favourite dish, green prawn in a bowl of noodle. There is a self-portrait photograph, and photos by Helmut Newton who wrote on one: "You stick to the noodles and I take the snaps! Love Helmut".

An even longer list of artists from Francis Bacon to Howard Hodgkin doodled in the "artist book" which was kept in the restaurants and features in the film *Basquiat* - made last year - in which David Bowie played Andy Warhol.

Now, in an extraordinary blitz of publicity, the collection of around 30 works is being brought together from his home and restaurants for the first time to mark three decades in business.

This month it is on display in Los Angeles. Next October it comes to the London gallery of old friend James Mayor where it will be launched with a suitably star-packed party. In a similarly immodest accompanying gesture, celebratory postcards list

the stars from Muhammad Ali to ZZ Top who have supped chez Chow.

When the first restaurant opened for business in Knightsbridge, south-west London, on Valentine's Day 1968, Mr Chow was credited with merging east and west, serving Peking cuisine to celebrities who included Lauren Bacall, Marlon Brando, John Lennon and Mae West in meticulously designed surroundings.

He went on to become a celebrity himself, marrying four times including once to the model Tina Chow, who later died from Aids, and acting in the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*. Now in his 60th year, he lives in Los Angeles.

Philippe Garner, a Sotheby's expert in 20th-century decorative art, became Mr Chow's friend when the restaurateur was one of the great collectors of art deco furniture and he has written the introduction to the catalogue of the collection. He insisted yesterday that Michael Chow was far from the egocentric that having so many portraits might suggest.

"It's not like that because he has got a great sense of humour. He was very determined building the collection, but he managed to do it with a certain wit and a certain flair that defuses any pretentiousness and pomposity," Mr Garner said.

"In every case they have grown out of either friendship or a mutual respect. I don't think he's ever gone cold to an artist he doesn't know."

A spokeswoman for Mr Chow said that he had always had a great affinity with artists. "Right from the beginning, artists would paint in exchange for dinner. I wouldn't like to put a value on the collection but it's very valuable," she said.

Asked whether it did not appear somewhat egotistical to have so many portraits of himself, she said: "He's a most self-effacing man. It's not really an ego trip at all."

Tying the knot in the dome of delight

Couples may be able to exchange millennial wedding vows in Peter Mandelson's dome, it was revealed yesterday. But, Fran Abrams reports, buildings licensed for civil weddings must be both dignified and permanent. Will the Greenwich exhibition fit the bill?

There will be surfball games. There will be the chance to scramble inside a huge human body. And now - maybe - there will be nuptials.

The New Millennium Experience Company, in charge of the dome, has confirmed it is thinking of setting aside a part of its building for couples who want a novel place to tie the knot.

Under new rules introduced in 1995, the owners of "seemly" buildings can apply to councils for permission to host weddings. The only question is whether a 1000ft-wide Teflon-coated tent is a suitably sombre setting for something as serious as matrimony.

A spokesman for the NMEC said that it had decided to look into the possibility after it was suggested in a letter from Richard Heller, a *Mail on Sunday* columnist.

"As a result of his letter we have decided to check out what the situation is for the licensing of non-religious buildings and non-register offices for weddings. But nothing has moved on it yet," he said.

He added that the exhibition's organisers must ensure the correct legal process was followed. Guidance published by the Registrar General show that it is in fact fairly simple.

The owner of a suitable building must simply apply to his or her local authority, leaving time for an inspection and a 21-day grace period to allow objections to be made.

However, the criteria for the type of building that can be used raises more questions. Premises must "observe the dignity of the occasion," the guidance says.

"Suitable premises may include hotels, stately homes, civic buildings and other similarly prestigious premises. This means that marriages will not be able to take place in the open air, in a tent, marquee or any other temporary structure."

So, is a dome with a 25-year lifespan permanent enough for marriage? A spokeswoman for its local authority, the London Borough of Greenwich, thought it probably would be.

"A civil ceremony is something quite serious and we

wouldn't want anything frivolous, but if it was a suitable proposal we would look at it. We can't see any problem regarding the temporary nature of the building," she said.

Discussions are continuing on the provision of a religious site within the dome, but this will be separate from any place set aside for secular weddings.

The NMEC's spokesman said that the Lambeth Group, a committee of advisers overseen by the Archbishop of Canterbury, had said that it would be difficult to provide a church, chapel or temple within the dome. Any such site would need to be multi-faith and there was no precedent for a church which embraced Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Hindu and Sikh religions. Instead, it was likely that a room would be set aside for prayer and quiet reflection by people of all faiths.



Bliss under the Dome?

Photomontage: Jonathan Anstee

Agony aunt gets it wrong over gays

An article in which Anne Atkins, the newspaper agony aunt and vicar's wife, claimed that "a gay man is 17 times more likely to be a paedophile than a straight man" has been criticised by the Press Complaints Commission.

The polemic, published in the *Sun*, was judged to have failed to distinguish between comment, conjecture and fact. Seven people had complained to the commission.

Ms Atkins, who normally writes for the *Daily Telegraph*, first shot to national prominence when she used Radio 4's "Thought for the Day" slot to accuse the Church of England of being soft on gays.

She and her clergyman husband, Shaun, were also in the news recently when their 12-year-old daughter disappeared

from their home in south-west London. She was reunited with her parents 36 hours later.

Both Ms Atkins and the *Sun* had stood by her recent offending article, citing academic research to support the assertions. But the complainants maintained that she had drawn upon American studies which were flawed.

They were also outraged by her suggestion that "the life expectancy of a gay man without HIV is a shocking 43 years". A government written answer confirmed that such a statistic had no official foundation since a person's sexuality is not recorded at death registration.

The *Sun* had offered to publish a clarification, but this was rejected by the commission as inadequate.

— Rob Brown, Media Editor

e%perts

Over 500,000 Personal Equity Plan investors' trust Halifax to make them a tax-free return on more than £2 billion of their money. If you would like to find out more about how your savings could benefit from our expertise, just call us today for your free PEP Pack.

CALL NOW FOR YOUR PEP PACK

0845 600 0845

Alternatively, complete the coupon, and return to: FREEPOST, Halifax PEP. No stamp required. Please send me more information on the Halifax PEP and other Halifax Financial Services Limited products which may be of interest to me in the future.

Title	Forename(s)
Surname	
Date of Birth	
Address	
Postcode	
Daytime tel no.	
Evening tel no.	

HALIFAX

Get a little extra help.

*Figure quoted refers to both single company and general PEP investors. Halifax Unit Trust Management Limited, Registered in England No. 2792006, Registered office: Trinity Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX1 2BN. Regulated by the Personal Investment Authority and HMRC. A member of the Halifax Financial Services Marketing Group which offers life assurance, pensions and unit trusts. Halifax Unit Trust Management Limited is a subsidiary of Halifax plc. Tax free means no UK taxes are paid on investment growth or income. Tax rules will change next year. The value of your investment in a PEP can go down as well as up. To ensure we provide consistent customer service, calls may be recorded.

Blair intervention saves Barts from closure

Yesterday's decision to save St Bartholomew's hospital, Britain's oldest, was hailed as a triumph by some and an act of political cowardice by others. *Jeremy Laurence and Anthony Bevins* chart the bitter disagreements that lay behind the move.

The decision to save Barts was taken by Tony Blair in the face of opposition from the Treasury and some of his personal advisers, it emerged yesterday.

The Prime Minister, whose three children were born at the hospital, pledged shortly after he took over as Labour leader that the facilities at Barts should be "preserved forever". Ignoring protests that running two teaching hospitals in one of the most deprived areas of the country would swallow resources needed for GP and community care, he answered an appeal from Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, that in the 50th anniversary year of the NHS a Labour government could not close one of the world's best-known hospitals.

Mr Dobson announced in the Commons yesterday that Barts would continue providing its current range of specialist services for seven to eight years while a new 900-bed hospital is built on the Whitechapel site of the Royal London hospital.

It would then become a specialist centre for heart and cancer patients similar to the Royal Marsden and Royal Brompton hospitals in west London. The decision is in line with recommendations in the review of London's health services, commissioned by the Government last June and published yesterday.

Consultants and patients at Barts were delighted that the five-year campaign to save it had succeeded, but GPs warned that it could spell disaster for the local community.

Mike Besser, professor of medicine at the hospital who spearheaded the campaign in its early stages, celebrated yesterday with Brian Sedgemore, the local MP. "It is a great day. Barts will be here forever," he said.



Continuing care: A nurse takes a patient's blood pressure at St Bartholomew's hospital which is now facing a much brighter future

Photograph: Tom Pilston

The hospital, founded in 1123, has survived an attempt by Henry VIII to sell it off, German bombs during the war, and now the 1993 decision of the previous government to axe it following the Tomlinson review of London's health services. The accident and emergency department was closed in 1995.

The Tomlinson review concluded that London had too many hospital beds compared with the rest of the country and recommended 2,500 should close. Because of Barts' location, between Guy's to the south, the Royal London to the east and University College to the west, it became the target.

The new review, chaired by Sir Leslie Turnberg, former

president of the Royal College of Physicians, has concluded that London is no longer overbedded. Mr Dobson told the Commons: "The Government has therefore abandoned the presumption we inherited from our predecessors that London is overprovided with acute hospital beds. As a result any future changes in bed numbers will be in line with those in the rest of the country."

The saving of Barts is, however, the second-best of two options put forward in the review. The first option, which the review panel describe as "the favoured solution clinically" would involve closing Barts and centralising its facilities in a new 1,200-bed hospital on the

Whitechapel site. However, the panel members feared that a new hospital of that size, which would have been the largest to be built in Europe for 20 years, was unrealistic. They feared that, if it were scaled down and Barts was still closed, that would be the "worst possible outcome".

To avoid this they proposed the two-site solution, retaining Barts as a specialist hospital. But they warn: "The key question is how much more expensive would it be to run a two-site versus a one-site operation?"

No figures were forthcoming from ministers yesterday, but a spokeswoman for the Royal Hospitals Trust, which favoured closing Barts, said it had been estimated at an extra £26m a year.

£140m boost for health care in London

Two members of the five strong London review panel are understood to have had second thoughts after they agreed the final report last November. Although they put their names to the recommendation that Barts should close they later said they believed the extra cost of maintaining Barts would be better invested in GP and mental health services in the capital which are among the worst in the country.

Yesterday, Frank Dobson recognised their concerns by announcing an extra £140m for those services over the next four years, with £30m allocated next year, although this will not be new money and will be taken from elsewhere in the NHS budget. He added that he was accepting all

the other recommendations of the review.

The panel looked at hospitals across the capital but with particular emphasis on three, including Barts. In south-west London, Queen Mary's hospital is to be replaced by a community hospital. In east London, it favoured developing a new hospital at Oldchurch hospital, rather than Harold Wood.

Mr Dobson said the proposals "provide a firm foundation for a 10-year programme to provide London with a modern and dependable health service". But John Maples, the Tories' health spokesman, said: "This is not saving Barts, but saving face for Labour."

— Jeremy Laurence, Health Editor

Boys, 10, cleared of rape

Two 10-year-old boys accused of raping a nine-year-old girl were cleared yesterday. The Old Bailey jury acquitted the two boys, who were believed to have been Britain's youngest rape defendants, after a direction on the evidence by the judge, Mrs Justice Bracewell.

Another 10-year-old boy was also cleared of indecent assault in the alleged attack at the boys' primary school in May last year.

Mrs Justice Bracewell told the jury that there was a "two-fold" reason for directing that there was no evidence for them to consider over the rape allegations.

One was that in the case of one of the boys accused of rape, the alleged victim "did not positively identify him". More fundamentally, said the judge, was the fact that during a police interview with the girl a police officer had "asked a question that was both leading and wholly improper, which in effect put words into the girl's mouth".

A third boy alleged to have raped her could not be prosecuted as he was just nine at the time and under the age of criminal responsibility.

The two boys cleared of rape and a fourth boy, an 11-year-old cousin of the alleged victim, face a charge of indecent assault and trial continues. All defendants had denied all the charges.

Prescott calls for pedal power

Ministers have been told to "get on your bike" by John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of environment, transport and the regions.

MPs were told yesterday that ministers have been urged in "green guidelines" by the Deputy Prime Minister's department to use public transport for business wherever possible and to walk or use their cycles for short distances.

Unfortunately for the Government's green image, officials at the department could not think of a single minister who currently rides a bike to work.

That is in marked contrast to the Tories, who had the bicycling baronet, Sir George Young, the former transport minister, and David Willetts, a former whip, in the front row of Whitehall push-bikers.

There may be more MPs taking to their bikes. The senior salaries review body last week recommended that MPs should be awarded a bicycle allowance to encourage them to leave their cars in the garage for constituency business.

Carriers take Whitehall to court over noise limits at airports

Government proposals to turn Heathrow into the quietest major airport in the world are to be challenged by carriers. *Randeep Ramesh, Transport Correspondent, reports on the battle to keep Britain's skies quiet.*

The world's biggest airlines announced a High Court challenge yesterday against tough new government noise limits for aircraft leaving from Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

Robert Ayling, the chief executive of

British Airways, has already warned ministers that the controversial proposed limits would cost the flag carrier £230m a year — a third of its profits.

According to the directors of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the moves would see Paris and Madrid replacing Heathrow as London's main international airport. Last year Heathrow handled more than 56 million passengers in 12 months.

"We have been to see ministers in Europe and they have listened. The British government were completely unsympathetic," said William Gaillard, a director of IATA. Mr Gaillard said that IATA lawyers

would be seeking leave for a judicial review of the Government's proposals later this week.

The new limits, put forward in a consultation paper last November, would force passenger jets to be at least three decibels quieter than at present during the day, and only emit 87 decibels at night.

"It is technically unfeasible," said Mr Gaillard. "No plane can meet these targets — not even the latest jets."

Mr Gaillard added that the lower limits would rule out many airlines' most profitable services — which see jets leaving fully loaded from Heathrow to destinations in Asia and South America.

IATA says that airlines will instead divert aircraft to European capitals and then see passengers taking smaller, quieter planes to London.

"There is plenty of space at other European hubs. Madrid has the go-ahead for five runways and Paris for four," said Mr Gaillard.

Airlines have already delayed the introduction of the limits, which were first proposed in 1996. In April last year, IATA won a high court case which forced ministers to reconsider their original plans.

But despite vigorous lobbying from Mr Ayling, who advises the Government on the Millennium Dome and who is personally

close to the Prime Minister, transport ministers have refused to budge. The industry has pointed out that the only aircraft which could meet the new limits are the latest Boeing 777s — which currently ferry passengers to the Caribbean and the Middle East.

"These limits would mean that aircraft like the jumbo [Boeing 747] would be unsuitable to fly with the current passenger numbers they carry," said Max Kingsley-Jones, commercial aviation editor of *Flight Magazine*.

The Government remains unmoved. "Our position has not changed from the previous government's," said a spokesman for the Department of the Environment.

W African gangs using Internet

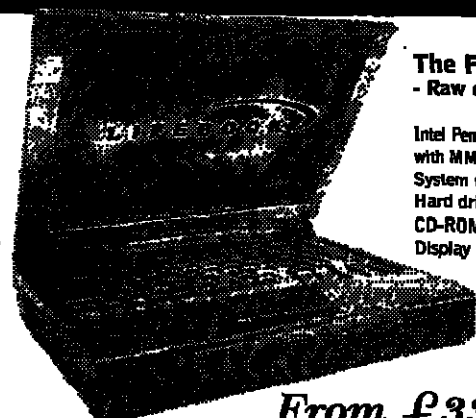
West African organised criminals are using the Internet to obtain tens of thousands of names and addresses as targets for fraud, it emerged yesterday.

M15 and M16 are helping crack-down on the criminals, who are mainly Nigerian, responsible for an estimated £3.5bn of fraud in the UK every year as well as drug trafficking.

The National Criminal Intelligence Service has set up a special section to combat the criminals who sent an estimated 1 million letters which seek to con individuals and companies out of money.

— Jason Bennetto

Better performance. Better prices.

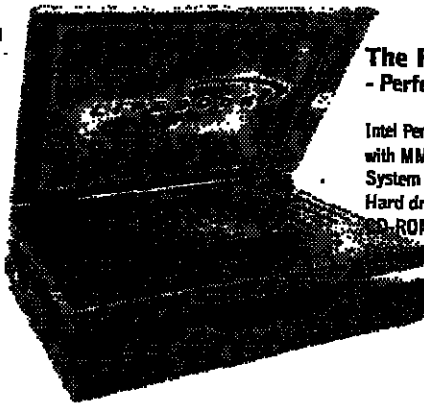


The Fujitsu LifeBook 900 series
- Raw computing power

Intel Pentium® processor 233 MHz
with MMX™ technology
System memory 32-160 Mb SDRAM
Hard drive 5 Gb
CD-ROM drive 20X modular
Display 13.3" XGA TFT

Includes Word 97 CD

From £3360
(£3948 inc VAT)

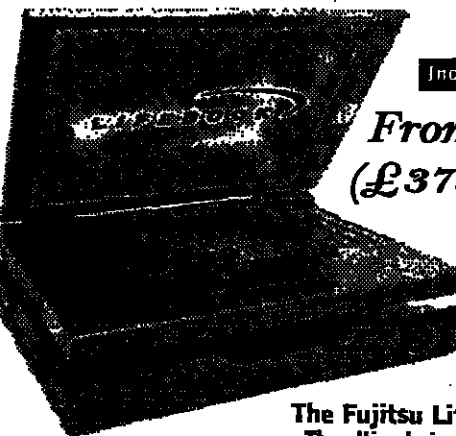


From £1040
(£1222 inc VAT)

The Fujitsu LifeBook 700 series
- Performance & all round functionality

Intel Pentium® processor 133 - 166 MHz
with MMX™ technology
System memory 16-96 Mb SDRAM
Hard drive 1.6 - 3.2 Gb
CD-ROM drive 20X modular (optional)
12.1" SVGA STN or TFT

Includes Word 97 CD



Includes Word 97 CD

From £3230
(£3795.25 inc VAT)

Including LAN Enhancement Unit

The Fujitsu LifeBook 600 series
- The ultimate in mobile computing

Intel Pentium® processor 200 MHz
with MMX™ technology
System memory 32-96 Mb SDRAM
Hard drive 3.2 Gb
CD-ROM drive 20X in LAN enhancement unit
Display 12.1" XGA TFT

The Fujitsu LifeBook™ series of notebook computers. Innovative technology and performance from one of the world's largest computer companies. And the dependability and value for money that have made us Europe's fastest-growing notebook supplier*.

* Q3 '96 to Q3 '97, source IDC

Warranty 3 year International - courier collect & return

For further information please contact: FUJITSU EXPRESS RESPONSE CENTRE, FREEPOST BD2715, Skipton, North Yorkshire, BD23 1BR Tel: 0345 023 985 Fax: 01756 702 856

Title _____ Forename _____ Surname _____ Job Title _____

Company Name/Address _____

20 I.

Post Code _____

Tel No _____

Fax No _____

FUJITSU

PCs • NOTEBOOKS • SERVERS

هنا من الاصل

Cool Britannia begins to go cold on trendy Blair

Has Cool Britannia turned its back on Blair? A leading style guru has dismissed Labour's attempts to schmooze with the glitterati, while one of Britain's leading theatrical figures has again attacked Labour for not supporting the arts. Fran Abrams and David Lister report on dissent among those whom Blair would like to call his own.

In a bizarre twist of events, the head of a top fashion house gave a lecture last night to complain that the Prime Minister was trying too hard to be trendy.

Wayne Hemingway, chairman of Red or Dead, told the Social Market Foundation that attempts to "rebrand" Britain as the epicentre of coolness were just "sad."

"By simply inviting a few (mostly naïf) pop stars and comedians to drinkies at Number Ten, the very people Blair is trying to impress will be turned off," he said. "It brings to mind those sad pictures of Harold Wilson with the Beatles and it certainly didn't enamour Harold Wilson to British youth."

Showing "corny repeated pictures of raving at the Ministry of Sound" to denote coolness was the 1990s equivalent of "god-awful" 1970s postcards of King's Road punks, he added. Most of Labour's young MPs were less youthful than his grandmother, and she died three years ago.

"Forward-thinking can live side-by-side with heritage. Let the parties of retired middle Americans with their sad anoraks and check slacks soak up our heritage while their

grandchildren discover a more youthful Britain," he suggested.

Mr Hemingway believes there is a widespread backlash against the Labour government in the creative industries. Posing for photocalls is all very well, but nothing is being offered in return, he told *The Independent*.

"At the moment we are seeing absolutely tons of publicity saying 'Aren't I cool and trendy, there's no other government as cool and trendy in the world.' They have got to start proving



Labour have got to start proving there is more substance apart from drinkies at No 10' Wayne Hemingway

it. It's very early days for Labour and we want them to succeed, but they've got to start proving there is some substance apart from drinkies at Number Ten."

Mr Hemingway's assault on new Labour's street cred is the latest in a string of attacks from the world of fashion, design and pop and the theatre.

First, Stephen Bayley resigned as creative director of the Millennium Dome project and took the Government to task for market-testing its ideas by focus groups.

Then last Sunday Alan McGee, the founder of Creation Records and a £50,000 donor to Labour before the election, told the *Observer* that Tony Blair was "all surface".

Ten days ago Sir Peter Hall, the theatre director, used an awards ceremony attended by Chris Smith, Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport, to bitterly attack the Government's Arts Council funding cut. Yesterday, Sir Peter accused the Government of "dumbing down Britain" by minimising arts teaching in primary schools. He made his remarks as he launched the theatrical world's own education initiative at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in the West End of London.

"The other thing the Government has done is take music, art and drama off the priority list in primary schools, which I think is awful. This awful thing will lead to the dumbing down of the nation. So we shan't need any art galleries, theatres or opera houses, which of course would be a great benefit from a cost-savings point of view," he told an audience of actors and supporters.

Twelve leading directors and actors are giving their services free to offer talks and masterclasses to drama students and secondary school pupils hoping to enter the profession.

Afterwards Sir Peter said Labour's arts policy filled him with "utter dismay". A friendly peer had asked him "not to rock the boat", he disclosed. "But I said 'Where is the boat? I don't see a boat labelled Labour arts policy'."

It was important young people should have no illusions about life in the theatre, he said, adding: "Being in the theatre isn't about glamour, easy options and easy money - it's about hard work, crucial discipline and often no money at all."



Wheels for women: The launch issue of Nuts about Motoring and (right) a Sixties advertisement for the Mini



Image: Advertising Archives

Car magazine puts women in the driving seat for first time

Britain's first motoring magazine for women is to be launched in the spring. *Clare Garner* gets a test drive.

In 1996, more women than men aged between 18 and 25 bought new cars. By 1999 the industry expects women between 18 and 40 to be the dominant consumers in the car market. Women buy cars, love their cars, but they do not read about cars. *Nuts about Motoring*, the forthcoming female-friendly motoring magazine,

believes it has spotted a gap in the market.

Helen Mound, the editor, is planning to "stick two perfectly manicured fingers up at magazines which rave on about cars that snap knicker elastic at five paces and compare automotive curves with Daryl Hannah's curves". She says that she is catering for people who "enjoy motoring as motorists, not as testosterone-driven imbeciles".

Nuts about Motoring hopes to attract around 90,000 female readers who are alienated by the existing car press. "Unimaginative sexual innu-

endoes designed to insult, ridicule or merely dig at the fairer sex have been far too easy for the motoring press since the first car company stuck a dolly bird on its new car in the Fifties," said Ms Mound, whose husband edits the magazine *Performance Car*. "You know, a girl on the bonnet of a big, red sports car is erotic, but you know, a girl driving the same car is a damn sight more erotic."

The magazine is aimed at car-owning female drivers between 21 and 40. The average reader would own a one-year-old car worth £8,000-£12,000,

but aspires to exchange it in due course for one worth £15,000-30,000. She favours style and speed of cars, but is "smart with her money". She enjoys driving and sees herself as competent behind the wheel. She is likely to be independent - the number of single women aged 18 to 40 rose from 18 to 26 per cent from 1980 to 1990 - and successful - 45 per cent of female graduates find work within six months compared with 40 per cent of men.

Among the contributors will be Vicki Butler-Henderson, co-presenter of BBC's mo-

toring programme *Top Gear*, with a column "From lipstick to dipstick".

Angela Giveton, the magazine's managing editor, said: "We know the market. We make no apologies about being female. We intend to cover interesting topics and teach women the art of negotiation. It is not patronising. It will save them money."

"A car is the second biggest purchase a woman makes after her home. Men are expected to know about these things, but women haven't got the media to address them," Ms Giveton said.

Are you a recent graduate?

Consider yourself a high flier?

Looking for that all important career move?

Then you can't afford to miss

The Independent's new pull-out supplement every Thursday with pages of graduate jobs

If you want a career and a lifestyle that's going places

THE INDEPENDENT

first direct

Free from charges

Banking with First Direct is free because we do not charge Cheque Account customers for everyday banking transactions, even if you're overdrawn. And all our customers automatically receive an overdraft of £250 - also free of any fees. So compared to other high street bank accounts you're better off with First Direct from day one. We're a member of the HSBC Group which is one of the largest banking and financial services organisations in the world, and in the course of a year you'll find we offer more cost effective current account banking. And the service we provide means you benefit in many other ways too.

By telephone, 24 hours a day

We provide the ultimate in convenience. You can bank with us at any time, 365 days (and nights) of the year, from wherever there's a telephone, in your home, office or car. And all UK calls are charged at local rates.

Personal and professional service

Every call is answered by our Banking Representatives. They have all they need at their fingertips to deal with your day-to-day banking needs. And when you require more specialised assistance, such as a loan, they can instantly refer you to someone who can help.

Getting cash is easy

Every Cheque Account customer receives the First Direct Card. This allows you to withdraw up to £500 a day from over 13,500 cash machines around the UK, including those of Midland. It also guarantees cheques for £100 and includes the Switch payment facility.

So is paying bills

Our service includes a free bill payment service. Simply call, tell us who to pay, how much and when, and we do it. This means you can pay your bills at the most convenient time without the need to keep having to remember to organise it.

A full banking service with more benefits

As well as our Cheque Account we offer saving, borrowing, travel and insurance services cost effectively by telephone. Take saving; our rates are always competitive, we offer transfers to and from your Cheque Account. So your money is always working hard without the need for you to do the same.

We work hard to maintain the service

The best people to demonstrate the quality of a banking service are its customers - 81% of ours have recommended us to their friends and colleagues in the last 12 months.

Transferring your account is straightforward

We appreciate how daunting changing bank accounts can be. So we help you to make it more straightforward. We can save you time by completing the application form with you over the phone, and giving you a decision, subject to a couple of further checks, almost immediately. Then we help you to make transferring your salary, direct debits and standing orders as simple as possible too. But first we make it easy (and free) to find out more. Call now on 0800 24 24 24 or complete the coupon.

if you don't enjoy free banking...

Annual current account charges

(all charges are free of VAT)

Lloyds Classic	£96.00
NatWest Current Plus	£60.00
Barclays Bank Account	£60.00
First Direct Cheque Account	£0.00

...you're with the wrong bank

Join us today and never be with the wrong bank again

0800 24 24 24

Call free anytime quoting reference BB853

or complete the coupon and post to:

First Direct, FREEPOST, Leeds LS98 2RF

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms or Title

Surname

Forename(s)

UK Address

Postcode

Telephone No

Blair: Ulster killings may go on even after settlement

The possibility of Northern Ireland extremists continuing their killing, even after a political settlement has been agreed, is built into the Government's strategic thinking on the peace process. Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, reports Tony Blair's views.

The May deadline for agreement on the Northern Ireland peace process remains "realistic", and the Government was continuing to work towards it, the Prime Minister's official spokesman said yesterday.

One the eve of his visit to Washington, Mr Blair told American correspondents in London that President Clinton had been "as solid as a rock" in his support for the peace process, and relations with the Republic of Ireland had never been better.

The Prime Minister told the *Washington Post* that he was more optimistic than he had been a week ago, though he was careful not to bank on a breakthrough.

"It would be an immense historical achievement if we were to lay to rest hundreds of years of bloodshed and division," he said, "but I remain stubbornly optimistic [that] it is possible to do so, but that may just be my nature rather than reality..."

Mr Blair gave a remarkably frank run-down on the process in his briefing with the American correspondents. "I think the two big things really are, first, to get an outline agreement of a lasting settlement and that is a matter of detailed negotiation that

is now under way. That is the next big juncture for people making their choices. And the second thing is clearly that you then put that in a referendum to the people of Northern Ireland. There will be a referendum in the Republic of Ireland, too.

"It is not a statement of the obvious that if you get both those things done, you are through and home and dry. But I think that if those two things are done, it becomes virtually impossible for anyone to argue that the will of the people has not been clear."

However, the Prime Minister then added: "If you manage to do that, it doesn't avoid the situation that a few extremists get back on to killing people, you can never tell; the history of Northern Ireland is that people are prepared to do that irrespective of whether there is any popular support for what they are doing at all."

"But I think it makes it very difficult for anyone who is engaged in violence to achieve any form of respectability once these two things have happened."

"It is important to realise that that is a very clear strategic objective; that you have got to get to the stage where you have built such a strong set of democratic ramparts, if you like, around the situation there, that they cannot be stormed any longer by fanatics who want to wage war on the democratic process."

As for the recent spate of killings, Mr Blair said: "It is very difficult to have any policy of law enforcement that can deal with a situation where somebody just walks up to a taxi cab rank and shoots dead the first taxi driver they see. What do you do with people like that? We have just got to keep on working at the process..."



Mo Mowlam at a press call after the exclusion from the London talks of the Ulster Democratic Party

Mowlam's dream of talks with no press

Mo Mowlam would like to take Gerry Adams, David Trimble and the other Ulster leaders to a remote island to try and reach a peace settlement. Colin Brown, Chief Political Correspondent, reports that a venue in Scandinavia is more likely.

More progress could be made if the various party leaders were to sit down with each other miles away from the nearest television camera, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland believes.

The Dayton, Ohio, peace talks which brought the warring factions together over Bosnia could become a model for the multi-party negotiations on a lasting peace settlement for Northern Ireland.

The parties were taken to an airbase in Ohio in 1995 to reach a settlement, and Ms Mowlam believes that something similar could be good for the multi-party talks on Ulster.

But the problem is where should she take them to get away from the press?

Bertie Ahern, the Irish Prime Minister, has suggested they should hold the final round of talks in a neutral country, such as Finland or Austria. Norway has also been suggested. "He is keen on the possibility of moving somewhere else for

the final session when you get down to real negotiations," said a Dublin source.

"There is a feeling around that if you lock them up in the same room, you can make progress."

Ms Mowlam became convinced during the three days when the talks switched to London that the press was becoming one of the obstacles to making progress towards agreement between the parties. The SDLP delegation also complained that the press were becoming part of the problem.

In the privacy of the negotiating room at Lancaster House, the party leaders dropped their public animosity and got down to business.

But after each session, each of the parties would brief the press against the others at the talks. Gerry Adams claimed that Ken Maginnis, a member of Mr Trimble's team, had refused to speak to him, saying: "I don't speak to murderers."

Ms Mowlam felt the talks had gone well, but the impression in much of the live television coverage was that they were going badly. She has privately felt exasperated at the "handstanding" of the parties for the benefit of the cameras.

The talks are due to reconvene in a fortnight in Dublin. Ms Mowlam has joked about hosting the final talks on an island in the Arctic but that would not stop the Ulster leaders posturing to the polar bears.

Armed forces will be exempt from the minimum wage

The armed forces are to be excluded from the minimum wage, the industry minister Ian McCartney announced yesterday.

The move represented a defeat for the Department of Trade and Industry in the face of demands from the Ministry of Defence that soldiers, sailors and airmen should be treated as exceptional cases.

As *The Independent* reported last December, the DTI put up a strong resistance to the claims. It feared that if the forces were

allowed to opt out then other groups would demand similar treatment.

Three weeks ago the President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, wrote to the Conservative industry spokesman John Redwood to confirm that the Bill would cover "all workers in the UK above compulsory school age". But yesterday, Mr McCartney told the standing committee on the National Minimum Wage Bill that he expected to announce details of the exemption soon.

MoD officials said that it would be hard to allocate an hourly minimum to those in the forces because they were paid a daily rate 365 days a year, reflecting the fact that they were always available for duty. Similar exemptions already existed in the United States and some other European countries.

A spokesman for the DTI confirmed that the Government had put down an amendment to the Bill because of

the "unique circumstances" of serving personnel.

The Government withdrew a clause on serving personnel from the committee stage discussions of the Bill so that MPs could have more time to debate it later, a Government spokesman said.

Mr Redwood said that the announcement represented a victory for new Labour over old Labour. "Why is a Tommy not worth the minimum wage?" he asked. "Mrs

Beckett has been humiliated by the Secretary of State for Defence. She did not wish to exempt our troops but she's been forced to do so."

"This will not be the last retreat she is going to make over this dangerous terrain," he added.

Diane Abbott, the Labour MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, described the development as "worrying". "Once you allow an exemption you are

opening the door to a flood of others," she said.

David Chidgey, Liberal Democrat trade spokesman, said: "We need to consider the armed forces as a separate issue but the fact that the Government is coming to the committee at a late stage to put forward a timetable shows that they have not thought this through in advance."

— Fran Abrams,
Political Correspondent

If you want a PC with the very latest technology, call Gateway 2000. We'll discuss your needs, then, when you're ready, we'll build you a PC that includes the freshest technology from the world's top component makers. Gateway's build-to-order method means you pay only for what you need. The Intel Pentium II processor-based system below is just one example of what we can make for you. And its advanced technology comes with Gateway's superb after-sales service.

Freephone technical support for as long as you own your GATEWAY™ system. Find out more by ringing

0800 39 2000, not forgetting to ask about our flexible finance options.

Or visit our Showroom at 10 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9HE.

Buy a PC that's so advanced it's not even built yet.

66-233

- Intel 233MHz Pentium® II Processor
- 32MB SDRAM, (expandable to 84MB)
- 92KB Pipeline Burst Cache
- 3.5" 144MB Floppy Disk Drive
- Mitsumi 18X min/32X max 90min CD-ROM
- 4.8GB 10ms Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- STB® iVidia Riva 128-Bit ACP 3D Graphics Accelerator, w/ 4MB SGRAM
- 15" EV500 TCO-92 0.28dp Monitor
- ATX Desktop Case
- Microsoft® Windows® 95 105 Keyboard
- MS® Windows 95, MS IntelliMouse™
- McAfee Anti-Virus Software
- MS Office 97 Small Business Edition plus Encarta® 97 (US Version) and MS Money 97
- 3 Year Limited Warranty

£999 (£1,207.90 inc VAT & Delivery)

GATEWAY2000
"You're not a friend to the business."

0800 39 2000
<http://www.gateway2000.co.uk>

Gateway 2000 - Clonsilla Industrial Estate - Dublin 17 - Ireland

©1998 Gateway 2000 Europe. Black-and-white spot design. "G" logo. "You've got a friend to the business" slogan. GATEWAY and GATEWAY 2000 are trademarks or registered trademarks of Gateway 2000, Inc. The Intel Inside Logo and Pentium are registered trademarks and MMX is a trademark of Intel Corporation. All other brands and product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies. All configurations and prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. All prices quoted in Sterling. All sales subject to Gateway 2000 Europe's standard terms and conditions and limited warranty. Minimum standard practice is to ensure monitor using the CRT size. Actual viewing area can be approx. 1.2" less.

THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT

£10 Conran lunch

The Independent and Independent on Sunday in association with Terence Conran are delighted to offer readers the opportunity to enjoy lunch or early evening supper at six of London's top restaurants throughout January and February for £10

From Monday January 5th until Saturday February 28th, the following establishments are offering readers a two course lunch or early evening supper for just £10 per person.

How to Book

To participate in the offer simply collect one token (tokens will be printed every day until Sunday February 28th) and then telephone the restaurant of your choice to book your Independent diner. On your arrival at the restaurant you should present your token in order to qualify for the offer. Each token is valid for a complete table booking. The tokens will be valid for one week only, and will be dated accordingly. To complete a booking in any of the six simply collect a token from the week in which you wish to dine. The booking is subject to all bookings are subject to availability.

A special discount is available on selected items in the Bluebird and Le Point de la Tour menus on presentation of the token.

Bluebird
100 Bedford Street, London WC2E 9HE
0171 330 4000
Lunch 12 noon - 3pm, early evening supper 6pm - 7pm, closed Saturday lunchtime, open Sunday 12pm - 3pm

Quaglino's 16 Bury Street, St James's, London SW1Y 6AA
0171 330 8767
Lunch 12 noon - 3pm, early evening supper 5.30pm - 6.30pm

Zinc Bar & Grill 21 Heddon Street, London W1R 7JY
0171 255 8899
The special 3 course menu is available between 12 noon and 7pm between Monday and Wednesday. The offer is extended until 11pm

THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT

Valid between Saturday January 31st and Friday February 6th

Name _____

Address _____

This voucher entitles the holder and all members of their booking to participate in The Independent/Conran Restaurants £10 lunch offer

Drought warning turns into a damp squib as water levels return

Across England, a year of above-average rainfall has ended the drought, leaving reservoirs brimful, rivers with healthy flows and water tables rising. Even the water companies came close to accepting that water is no longer in short supply, says Nicholas Schoon, Environment Correspondent.

With hindsight, the drought cracked last February when England and Wales had nearly half as much above the average rainfall for that month. That followed a remarkably dry January when the clouds delivered a meagre 17 per cent of the month's long-term average rainfall.

But that was the end of it. Seven of the past 12 months have had above-average rainfall. In the year up to the end of January, Meteorological Office records show that England and Wales have had 3 per cent above an average year's rainfall.

The rain has returned almost everywhere. Only one region, the rainy North-west, has had less than its average yearly rainfall over the past 12 months.

Most rivers have normal or

above-normal flows for the time of year, the Government's Environment Agency says. The majority of the water companies are reporting that their reservoirs are fuller than usual for this time of year, with drought-prone Southern saying its reservoirs are 100 per cent full.

"There's no doubt that the substantial rainfall has brought to an end the historic, 30 months dry period," said a spokesman for the Water Services Association, which represents nine of the 10 big water companies. But it is still appealing for customers not to use water wastefully, and says that it is hoping for the next three months to have average or above-average rainfall in order for groundwater levels to return to normal everywhere.

In some places - such as Gloucestershire - they are now well above average for the time of year. But there are a few places where the water table in the chalk aquifers is still far below its normal level for late winter, including Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk. "The drought is now reduced to a few pockets," said Terry Marsh, who monitors water resources for the Institute of Hydrology in Wallingford.

None the less, nearly 3 million people are still covered by hose-pipe or sprinkler bans, or both. Southern Water said it was "almost certain" to lift its sprinkler ban covering 800,000 people in parts of East and West Sussex within weeks.

Neither Essex and Suffolk Water, nor Sutton and East Surrey Water, in south London, have any short-term plans to lift their bans, which cover 1.7 million people and 270,000 respectively. Both said groundwater sources they relied on were still extremely low for the time of year.

One year's rainfall		
England and Wales, Feb 97 - Jan 98		
Region	Rainfall mm	% average annual rainfall
Anglian	685	116
Northumbria	882	104
North West	1187	99
Southern	888	114
Severn Trent	842	111
South West	1185	101
Thames	723	105
Welsh	1355	103
Wessex	924	111
Yorkshire	907	110

Ministers delay ban on raw milk

Moves to ban the sale of raw milk have been delayed, the Government has announced. Heavy representation by industry and consumers has forced the Ministry of Agriculture to put off its decision. Glenda Cooper, Consumer Affairs Correspondent reports.

The Government's proposal to ban the sale of raw cows' milk has been postponed after ministers decided to extend the consultation period.

The decision was taken after the ministry received requests from many small businesses to extend it, blaming the Christmas break for making it difficult for farmers to comment. The ministry said it was extending the consultation period on the proposed ban by three weeks so the new deadline for comments will be 24 February.

"It is important that there is adequate opportunity for all raw milk producers and consumers to have the chance to make their views known," said Jeff Rooker, the food safety

minister. "Protecting consumers remains our first priority but in these exceptional circumstances we have extended the consultation period."

The move comes amid criticism of the Government's decision to ban sales of beef on the bone, imposed after a consultation period of only seven days.

The milk ban in England was proposed last November following advice to ministers from independent scientists that the untreated milk could contain potentially harmful bacteria. Letters were sent out to 180 representative organisations and interested parties. Similar consultation exercises are taking place in Wales and Northern Ireland. The sale of raw cows' drinking milk has been banned in Scotland since 1983.

It sparked opposition from farmers who claim labels already ensure consumers are warned about the risks of drinking the milk. Sir Julian Rose, chairman of the Association of Unpasteurised Milk Producers and Consumers, said: "Some half a million consumers enjoy the taste of real milk fresh and unprocessed. Some suffer from allergies aggravated by the pasteurised equivalent and any ban will mean they will have to stop drinking milk altogether."

هكذا من الأصل



Frozen assets: The River Ver iced over at Redbourn in Hertfordshire yesterday, but a few years ago it had completely dried up

Photograph: Brian Harris

Prophets of gloom confounded

"The South-east of England will face a very difficult summer if we do not get at least 75 per cent of normal winter rainfall," - Dr Geoff Mance, water management chief of the Government's Environment Agency, November 1997. It did.

"There's no way we can say the drought is over," - Mike Walker, head of policy for the Water Companies Association, July 1997. He was speaking after the wettest June in more than 100 years.

"We would expect less rain to fall here as the climate changes world-wide, but not this much - it's already greater than we'd anticipate," - Dr Geoffrey Jenkins of the Meteorological Office's Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction, May 1997.

"Our climate is inherently capricious, but lately it does seem to have been moving towards the extremes of its range," - Terry Marsh, of the Institute of Hydrology, April 1997.

Phenomenon file Citroën Xantia



"It had all these... things" stutters

incoherent eyewitness "I've never seen

so much equipment for £12,740."

The Citroën Xantia Temptation 2 from £12,740. Features include:

- + Air conditioning. + Remote central locking. + Power steering. + Alarm. + Electric front windows. + Driver's airbag.
- + 6 speaker RDS radio cassette. + Front fog lights. + Body coloured bumpers and mirrors. + 16 valve engine.
- + One of a range of limited edition Xantias available now. + With a choice of petrol or diesel. + Saloon or estate.

The Citroën Winter Phenomenon

NOW THERE'S SOMETHING YOU DON'T SEE EVERY YEAR.

For more information call our Winter Hotline 0800 262 262.

*PRICE IS CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS. CAR SHOWN LIMITED EDITION CITROËN XANTIA 1.8i 16V TEMPTATION 2 SALOON, £12,740 ON THE ROAD. XANTIA TEMPTATION 2 TURBO DIESEL SALOON £13,895 ON THE ROAD. XANTIA TEMPTATION 2 ESTATE PRICES FROM £13,895 ON THE ROAD. ON THE ROAD PRICES INCLUDE £550 FOR VAT, DELIVERY, NUMBER PLATES AND TWELVE MONTHS ROAD FUND LICENCE. OPTIONAL METALLIC PAINT SHOWN AT EXTRA COST (£240). LIMITED EDITION MODELS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY.

Morals, tables and technology: why this is the best junior school in Britain

Frank Haverty, the head teacher of St Thomas More primary school in Coventry, is happy to describe himself as someone who has worn the same style clothes for more than 20 years, until they came back into fashion.

St Thomas More has itself continued to use relatively traditional teaching methods despite the dominance of progressive education for much of the time since Mr Haverty became head teacher in 1971. Set in a suburb of the city, the Roman Catholic school is one of 159 schools which gained an excellent report from the education watchdog and which have been named in the Chief Inspector of Schools' annual report.

The school's Ofsted report, published last June, said that most of its 380 pupils achieved well above the standards expected nationally in core subjects, including English, maths and science. Progress in other subjects was also praised as was the behaviour of the children, and their attitudes to learning and moral development.

Forty-five per cent of teaching was described as very good or excellent and 95 per cent was said to be sound. Mr Haverty and his governors believe that religious ethos is the basis of the school's success,

valuing the individual whilst making children aware of the importance of other people. This is supported by a teaching style which includes traditional techniques such as learning multiplication tables by heart and whole-class teaching, although the school also uses modern methods like group work. It has absorbed a number of up-to-date ideas and has invested around £12,000 in a computer suite. The school's approach is backed by well-motivated staff, and a partnership with parents and the local community.

St Thomas More primary has a mixed catchment area that includes many middle-class children. Only about 8 per cent of pupils have free school meals, compared with a national average of 16 per cent.

The school has a nursery on site which was built by Coventry City Council. The council spends more on education than the government recommends and this extra funding has helped make budgeting easier, although Mr Haverty said the school could always use more resources.

"We are traditional and make no apologies for that but we are not too rigid," he said. "I always think if anything is too rigid it will snap, so we try to make school fun."

The chairman of the governors,

Monsignor Tom Gavin, said: "We have some dedicated staff and they have really got an acknowledgement for what they have achieved."

Louise Daniels, whose seven-year-old son Stephen and five-year-old daughter Helen go to the school, said: "Teachers just seem to take a really genuine interest in the children, the teachers have good standards and they stick to them." Mrs Daniels' son has mild autism and the school has been very supportive of his special needs.

Mick Kelly, a publican, was pleased with the way his daughters Emma-leigh, aged nine and Nataleigh, aged six, were being taught.

"St Thomas More runs very well, basically because of the strong moral beliefs and good teachers," he said.

James O'Brien, a 10-year-old pupil at the school, said he liked maths and comprehension. "I think all our teachers are very good, she is there if you need help," he said.

Sarah Taberner, also aged 10, said: "My favourite subjects are history and art, my teacher is very good, she explains things to you and she interested me in those subjects."

— Matt Rodda



Starting out: Children working in the reception class at St Thomas More school, Coventry

Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

Middle-class children let down by bad teachers

Middle-class children at schools in leafy suburbs are being let down by bad teaching, says yesterday's annual report of the Chief Inspector of Schools. But, overall, standards are rising, reports Judith Judd, Education Editor.

"Education remains too much of a lottery," says the report from Chris Woodhead, the chief inspector. Schools with similar intakes in both the inner cities and the suburbs are performing very differently.

His report records that in some schools in affluent areas less than half of 11-year-olds are reaching the expected standard in English, well below the national average.

Mr Woodhead said yesterday: "Schools in the leafy suburbs have no excuse whatsoever for underachievement. These schools should be pushing the boundaries for children. Some don't."

Overall, teachers are teaching better. Only around 12 per cent of lessons are poor compared with 16 per cent a year ago and around 30 per cent four years ago.

Yet the proportion of bad schools remains unchanged. The problems of one in 10 continue to be "desperately intractable", says Mr Woodhead.

Overall, teaching is good in almost half of lessons and less than satisfactory in one in eight. Most bad teaching is to be found in classes of eight- and nine-year-olds in primary schools and among 13- and 14-year-olds in secondary schools.

Despite the improvements, Mr Woodhead insisted that his controversial figure for 13,000 bad teachers still stood.

Where schools are failing, the fault is often that of the head. One in six primary and one in 10 secondary heads —

more than 3,000 overall — lack the drive and determination to give proper leadership.

Mr Woodhead applauds a change in culture among teachers which has led to the agreement of teacher unions to new procedures for sacking bad teachers. "Four years ago, the idea that any teacher might be incompetent was dismissed as a ludicrous right-wing plot. Nobody now tries to defend the indefensible."

The culture change was clear, too, in the move towards more traditional teaching methods, such as whole-class teaching, setting by ability and more emphasis on the 3Rs. All have been backed by Mr Woodhead since he came into post four years ago.

But primary schools must do even better if they are to achieve the Government's ambitious targets, the report says.

Marking is not tough enough in some schools, Mr Woodhead said. Teachers either do not mark work or they fail to correct all the mistakes. Many do not use the information gained from assessment to help pupils.

The report also suggests that the tests for seven-year-olds may be too easy. Pupils may find themselves struggling in junior schools because the tests present too rosy a picture.

Stephen Byers, the school standards minister, said: "This is good news. It is clear that schools are beginning to rise to the challenge which we have set them. However, there is still much work to be done. There can be no room for complacency."

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: "The chief inspector seems to think he can switch on and off his approval of schools at random. Excellence should be celebrated but we have a very long way to go before trust can be restored between teachers and the chief inspector."

BEFORE YOU BUY A 1.6 5 DOOR HATCHBACK CONSIDER THESE TEN POINTS.

- 1 YEAR'S FREE INSURANCE
- 2 YEARS' FREE SERVICING
- 3 YEARS' DEALER WARRANTY
- ALFA 146 1.6 16V £14,489*

5 The budget which has expressed on the cutting edge of sports cars for over 50 years.



6 The new engine 1.6 Twin Spark engine, which is more powerful and efficient than ever. 20.2 in 10.5 seconds. 0-100 mph.



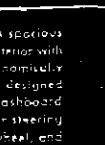
7 Auxiliary braking system with all road and broken that are combined of the front to prevent oversteering.



8 A spacious interior with ergonomically designed dashboard, leather steering wheel and driver's side airbag.



9 All models are fitted with an Alfa Color 3.0ml engine computer system.



10

Internet: <http://www.alfaromeo.co.uk>

FOR INFORMATION CALL

0800 718000

SELENIA 16V 16V 16V

*3 years' warranty is a maximum of 50,000 miles. 2 years' servicing up to a maximum of 20,000 miles. 1 year's insurance subject to conditions and underwriter's acceptance. Drivers must be between 25-70 years old. Customers in Northern Ireland will be subject to a £120 premium. Offer available on 1.6 and 1.6 16V models only until 28th February 1998. Products offered for sale may differ from those illustrated due to later production changes in specification, components or place of manufacture. Vehicle shown: Alfa Romeo 146 1.6 16V. On the road price includes 2000 for delivery to dealer, number plates, VAT and 12 months' road fund licence.

DIRECT LINE INSTANT ACCESS ACCOUNT

UP TO **7.25%** GROSS.
Congratulations.
You've just spotted a great savings rate.

Balance	Annual Gross Rate*
£1 - £4,999	5.00%
£5,000 - £9,999	6.15%
£10,000 - £24,999	7.00%
£25,000 - £49,999	7.65%
£50,000 - £99,999	7.75%
£100,000+	7.75%

All rates correct as 22nd January 1998.

Call one of the numbers below and find out how you can earn up to 7.25% gross.

0181 667 1121 LONDON 0161 833 1121 MANCHESTER 0141 221 1121 GLASGOW
CALL ANYTIME 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm Saturday.
A Royal Bank of Scotland company. Please quote ref. IND121

Calls recorded and monitored. Rates subject to variation. Deposits and withdrawals via your bank account - allow 3 working days. Full terms and conditions of the account are available on request. Direct Line and the red telephone are trademarks of Direct Line Insurance plc, used with its permission.

هذا من الأصل

Revealed: Thousands allowed to vote under false names

Battered wives, prison warders and police officers are being allowed to vote under assumed names in breach of election rules. Electoral officials revealed to our reporter that the anomaly was one of many in a system which was due for radical overhaul.

A provision for anonymous registration should be introduced to protect people who are genuinely at risk if they allowed their real names to go on the electoral roll, according to electoral officials.

Currently registration officers are taking sympathy on those who claim that they

and their families are at risk from having their addresses made public and bending the rules so that they can still vote. It is believed that many others are sacrificing their suffrage rather than going on the roll.

The Independent has been given a list of proposals from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), which oversees the compilation of the electoral roll throughout the country, which they have put to a government working party on electoral reform being chaired by George Howarth, the Home Office Minister.

Apart from introducing a facility for anonymous registration, they call for trials of electronic voting.

The AEA would also like disabled voters to be allowed to vote away from the polling station crush and would like steps

EXCLUSIVE BY IAN BURRELL

to be introduced so that blind voters could cast their vote in secret.

John Turner, chairman of the AEA, said: "Change is needed now. Voter turnout must be improved. The election process must be modernised and improved or the organs of government will become more and more remote from the people they claim to represent."

His deputy, Colin Marshall, said: "Each registration officer knows that people are not particularly happy that their details are public knowledge; prison officers, police officers, people at risk from their es-

tranged husbands. Unlike the council tax, there is no anonymous registration although a number of electoral registration officers get by this.

"Sometimes we put people in their maiden names, or police are put in their wife's maiden name."

He added: "It's technically wrong but I think that many election officers sympathise with people in this position. I personally know of people who have been traced by villains and either had their property vandalised or have been threatened."

The Home Office working party will look

at various ways of improving electoral practices, including registration of the homeless and setting up a continuous or rolling register so that people do not lose their vote if they move home shortly before an election. It will also look at automated voting, whereby voters press a button instead of marking a cross against the name of their chosen candidate. Such electronic methods have been tried in other countries and speed up the counting process.

In its submission, the AEA, expresses the view that Britain has allowed itself to rest on its laurels as the cradle of democracy. "The British electoral system is based on custom and practice going back well over a century. No exhaustive review has been carried out during that time - changes have often been piecemeal, minor

or technical with little direct consequence for the voter."

The Independent has also obtained a copy of the latest British electorate figures, compiled by the Treasury.

They show that despite the activity that surrounded the run-up to last May's election, when campaigns like Rock the Vote and Operation Black Vote aimed to attract the missing young and ethnic minority voters, there are still nearly 2 million people missing from the electoral register.

By last February, there were 39,229,038 people registered to vote, an increase of 235,000 from the previous year. But because the population eligible to vote increased by 179,000, the number of missing voters was only reduced by 56,000 to 1,982,434.

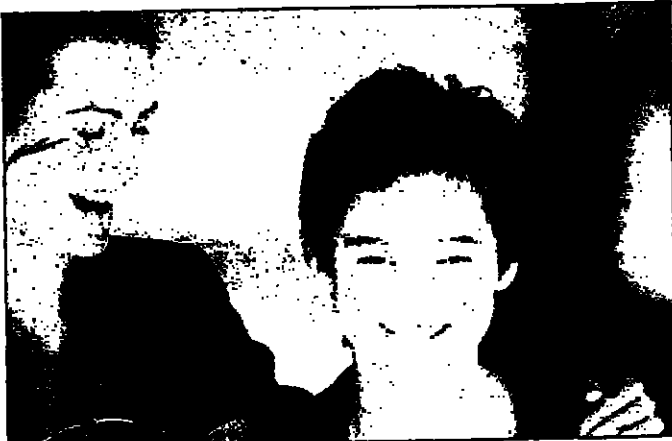
After the hype, British fashion lures the serious money

After decades of hype and no substance, London fashion is finally being taken seriously. Last week, Paul Smith, a world player in menswear with sales totalling £165m last year, announced that he would be showing his women's collection on the catwalk for the first time later this month. And he has chosen London as the venue.

Hussein Chalayan, one of our most challenging and innovative designers, announced that he had signed a three-season contract with American giant TSE Cashmere, and has also been signed up to design a capsule collection for the British chain Top Shop - who will in return sponsor his London catwalk show this month. Chalayan's TSE New York collection will be shown on the catwalk at New York Fashion Week at the end of March. The line is expected to make £4m wholesale in the first year.

Meanwhile, Sonja Nuttall, a designer with the potential to be Britain's answer to Jil Sander, has gained sound financial backing and support for her company from British high-street supplier, Intraport.

Young designer Owen Gaster, who has struggled to self-finance his past five collections, has won backing from the Italian manufacturer Casor, who will sponsor his show alongside BHS. And Antony Price, a fashion legend since the Seventies when he



Ready to go: (clockwise from left) Antony Price, thought to be in the running for the top Versace post; Sonja Nuttall, lifted by sound financial backing; John Galliano, chief designer at Dior; and Hussein Chalayan, who has signed contracts with Top Shop and the American giant TSE Cashmere

Photographs: Chris Moore/Ben Elwes

the launch of a cosmetics range which needs the publicity and kudos a couture collection brings.

Price has his own small-scale but thriving couture business, based in London. His customers include Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, Patsy Kensit, Jerry Hall and Anjelica Houston. And, like the late Gianni Versace, Antony Price is in the business of creating an illusion of perfection. The safety-pin dress that Liz Hurley wore to the premier of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was the result of clever corsetry. Women, even Liz Hurley, simply do not have bodies that go in and out in exactly the right places. But with a little help from Mr Price, anything is possible.

"If I am given the money to do it, I will not fail," said Price yesterday from his studio where he is working on a collection to be shown at milliner Philip Treacy's show during Fashion Week later this month.

"The terrible thing that has always hampered me is not a lack of ideas ... but money. Putting on a catwalk show is like asking the world to a fantastic party and spending the next five years paying it off." Instead of "staggering around on a British shoe string" the job at Versace would give the resources to bring his ideas to life. "You could do fantastic things there," he says.

— Tamsin Blanchard

dressed Roxy Music, Jerry Hall, Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones, as well as David Bowie, is the latest in a line of British designers rumoured to be in the running for the job as head of Versace Couture.

The wacky ideas that have made London the creative capital of the fashion world are finally being turned into serious money.

British designers became a viable commercial proposition when John Galliano was given the house of Givenchy to reinvent. Then came Alexander McQueen, also at Givenchy, and Stella McCartney at Chloe. The traditional fashion houses have recognised that to capture affluent young customers and maintain any credi-

bility beyond the millennium they need to buy-in young blood. The British fashion pack is the natural hunting ground.

Antonio Berardi, whose first collection for Italian leather company Ruffo is unveiled in Milan next month, is also rumoured to be up for the Versace job. But gossip links 52-year-old Antony Price with the Italian house.

SEND A VALENTINE MESSAGE TO YOUR LOVED ONE AND YOU COULD WIN A WEEKEND FOR TWO AT HENLOW GRANGE HEALTH FARM!



Once again this year THE INDEPENDENT will be publishing your romantic, mysterious, funny and just plain daft messages to your loved one. In time for Valentines day we will send on your behalf an anonymous card informing them to look for their personal message in The Independent on Saturday.

The best and most original message published in The Independent will win a wonderful weekend for two at HENLOW GRANGE HEALTH FARM in Bedfordshire with a runner-up prize of a "Top To Toe" day for two.

All you have to do now is compose your message and follow the instructions below, then start to dream of a full body massage, facial, indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, steam room, plunge pool, gym and a relaxation programme.....and of course a well earned meal!

YOUR DETAILS (in capitals)

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Daytime Telephone No. _____

YOUR VALENTINE'S DETAILS (in capitals)

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Daytime Telephone No. _____

Write your message above and tick your option (all prices inclusive of VAT) If in a foreign language please attach English translation.

8 words for £9.95 + extra words at £1.25 each
3cm x 1 column box advert for £50
As above plus extra centimetres at £5 each

I enclose a cheque made payable to Newspaper Publishing PLC, or please debit for the amount of £_____ copy date _____ my Visa/Mastercard/AMEX number _____ One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL Post this coupon to The Independent Valentine, Classified Dept, between 9.30 - 5.30pm Monday to Friday.

ALL MESSAGES TO BE RECEIVED BY 12 NOON WEDNESDAY 11th FEBRUARY.

If you do not wish to be sent details on products or services as recommended by The Independent please tick here ☐

SOMETHING TO DECLARE

We can save you at least 20% on your international phone calls.

This is a good sign: we promise to save you money on your phone bill, even if you have BT's PremierLine and Friends & Family schemes. And if we don't save you money? Well, then we give you back double the difference.

If you regularly make international calls, you can enjoy savings of at least 20%, and up to 46%, against BT's basic rate, on international calls, weekday evenings and all weekend. And in February and March, you receive an extra 25% off the rates for weekend calls of 5 minutes or more to 15 of our most popular destinations.

You can also save on UK long distance calls, and automatically receive at least 100 free minutes of local evening calls every month, too. (All for a quarterly fee of £4.50.) To find out how much you could save, ring us now on FreeCall 0500 500 366, quoting RINDSE.



CABLE & WIRELESS
What can we do for you?

*Price Pledge applies only on Cable & Wireless SmartCall, UK-Call and LocalCall bills only. For cable customers the Price Pledge comparison is on your total bill for non-cable customers it is on your total bill excluding line rental. Does not apply to calls made using Calling Card. For full details see our Price List. Comparison excludes BT's temporary promotional offers. Savings correct as at 22/1/98, for a 5 minute weekday evening call unless otherwise stated. Application subject to status. To improve our service, we may occasionally monitor or record your telephone calls to and from Cable & Wireless.

France's teachers strike against Socialist 'treachery'

Half of the secondary school teachers in France went on strike yesterday to protest against reforms in the Western world's most unwieldy education system. John Lichfield, who has children at a French school, takes the side of the education minister, Claude Allègre.



Jospin: Had teachers' vote

Charlie, aged nearly eight, has just started to learn geometry by heart. The definition of "a line", he intones, is something which goes in one direction for ever; unless you put a capital A at one end and a capital B at the other and then it is not a line at all but only a part of a line. Turning to his French grammar book, we learn, among other things, that "the ducks have left the region". In his project work - a great innovation in primary schools in France - he and his classmates have been pre-occupied, in stupefying horticultural detail, with the "life-cycle of the haricot bean". On Monday, there was no school: the teachers had declared a "day of concentration", a distressingly regular occur-

rence, when the teachers, as far as we can make out, talk among themselves.

I should add that Charlie loves his school; the discipline, the curriculum, based on a rote-learning more unbending than I experienced in England in the Fifties, appeals to a juvenile sense of order which we had not previously suspected in him. For parents, the system, based on marks out of 10, is reassuringly easy to follow. However, the total absence of creativity, or independent thinking, something which marks French education right up to university level, is startling and disturbing.

Among those that it disturbs is Claude Allègre, the son of teachers, a former university

professor, and now minister for education in the Socialist-led government of Lionel Jospin. Mr Allègre came to office last June with a promise to "take the fat off the mammoth" of the French education system.

He wanted to devolve the legendary central power of the education ministry - one of the largest civilian employers in Europe with 1,500,000 staff - to allow more decision-making and hiring at local and school level. That would mean altering the age-old system under which teachers were allocated to schools throughout France by committees in Paris (on which the main teaching unions were heavily represented). He criticised the absenteeism of teachers and (hooray, for Mr Allègre) their practice of awarding themselves study days in term time.

He also started an inquiry into the curriculum which he described (perfectly) as "too ambitious and not demanding enough". Every French education minister tinkers with the school curriculum but there has been no fundamental change in approach, so it is said, since the 1880s.

Mr Allègre said that he wanted to move towards a

more orderly progression of learning. His researches, to the horror of the teachers, included asking children in French lycées (16- to 18-year-olds) for their opinions.

The whole Allègre programme is seen by many teachers and, crucially, by the unions as a treacherous attack on their status and privileges: treacherous because teachers tend overwhelmingly to vote for the Socialist party and its allies.

Yesterday's strike - supported by 50 per cent of secondary teachers, not quite as many as the union leaders had hoped for - was the first barrage in what may prove to be a long war. It was aimed at different parts of the Allègre programme according to which union was involved. The largest teaching union, the SNES, is mostly incensed by the plan to decentralise hiring and firing of staff (which would remove much of the union's power).

But the dispute is seen, on both sides, as a battle to preserve acquired rights: a classic example of the mobilisation of the French forces of *immobilism*. It remains to be seen whether Mr Allègre, unlike his timid predecessors, will stick to his guns.



Cat napped: A fireman in Mexico City drags an escaped lioness from under a car after she was spotted on the street by a police patrol. Safely caught, the big cat was taken to Chapultepec Zoo. Photograph: Reuters

Bossi talks of armed fight for secession

Telephone taps on Italy's Northern League boss have revealed that Umberto Bossi planned to back up his threat of secession with violence, writes Andrew Gumbel in Rome

possible number of those pieces of s— to the next world." Although Mr Bossi and his 40 fellow separatists under investigation have yet to be sent to trial, the political world was quick to react to the leaked telephone taps with sentiments of unequivocal condemnation. "These are statements of ex-

north as a Gandhi-style struggle based on non-violence.

Alberto Mazzonetto, the Venice secretary who had the "machine-gun" conversation with Mr Bossi, yesterday tried to explain away the strong language as no more than a joke, and strongly rejected a suggestion by the Verona-based public prosecutor, Guido Papalia, that the League leadership displayed Fascist tendencies.

But numerous public figures yesterday wondered what a magistrate was doing tapping the phone conversations of sitting parliamentarians without permission, and also how evidence supposedly kept *sub judice* could find its way into the columns of the daily press.

Mr Bossi's number two, Roberto Maroni, said his party would consider suing Judge Papalia for violation of the constitution and the law on phone-tapping. The League would also boycott any trial in which its members were involved.

It was hard to tell just how serious the leaks might prove for Mr Bossi. He is known for his flights of florid language, few of which seem to be backed up by concrete signs of menace.

On the other hand, Mr Bossi's rhetoric has sharpened considerably of late. In a recent attack on Rome he described it as being filled with "pigs" and "bastards" - something which this week earned him a libel writ from the city's mayor, Francesco Rutelli.



Bossi: 'We'll have guns'

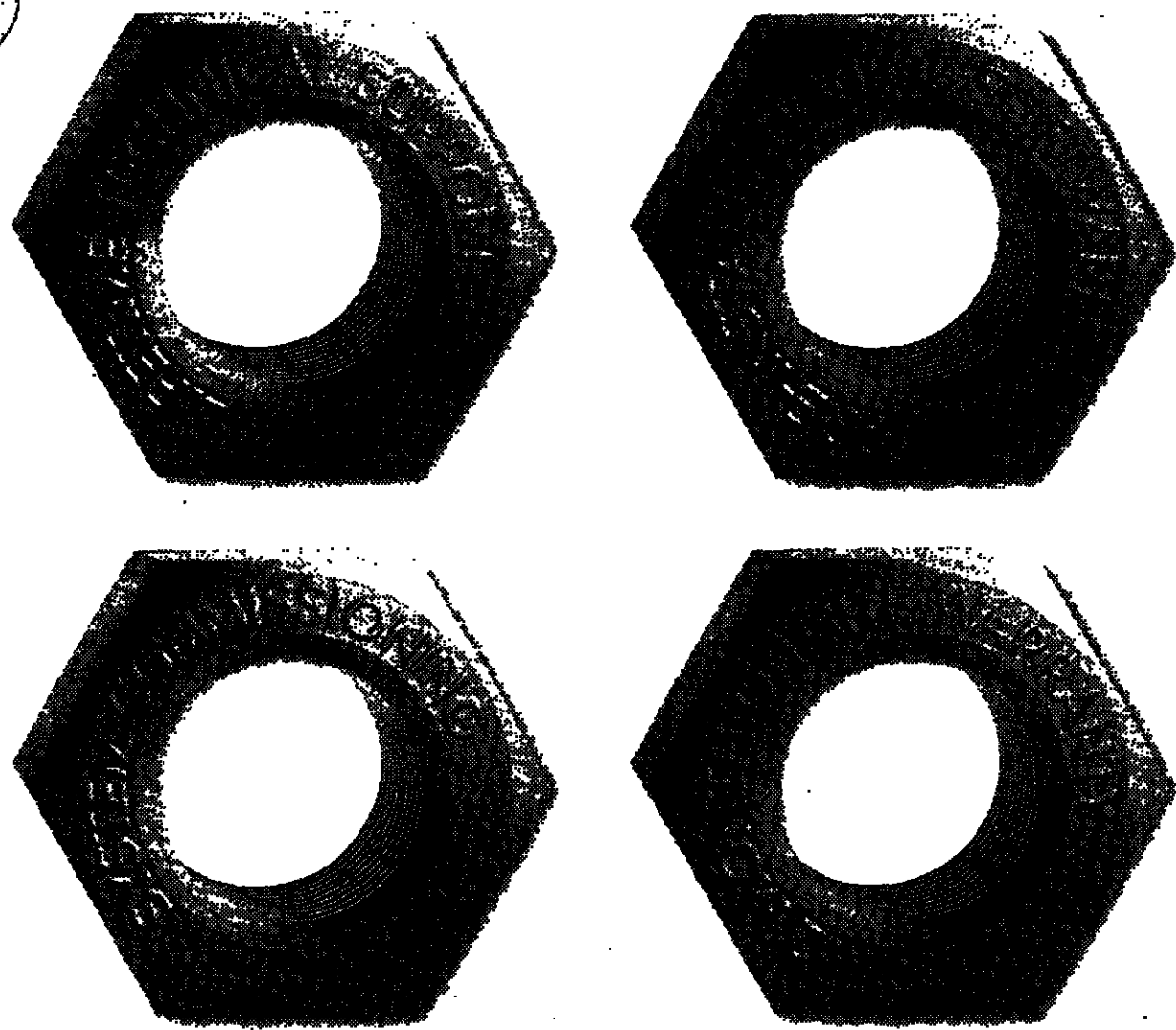
It was exactly the compromising evidence Italian prosecutors have been seeking to nail the northern separatist leader. For months they have been investigating Umberto Bossi's Northern League for possible subversion of the state, looking high and low for a smoking gun - evidence that the party planned to back up its threats of secession from Italy with organised violence.

As was clear from the leak of documents to yesterday's morning papers, they have at last hit on something. Transcripts from tapped telephone conversations excerpted in the press produced numerous references by Mr Bossi and his followers to the need to organise street demonstrations and "beat up as many people as possible".

In one outburst to a party secretary from Venice, Mr Bossi looked forward to the day he could take his revenge on those political forces now out to destroy him: "We'll all have machine-guns in our hands, and it will be an enormous pleasure to despatch the maximum

ceptional seriousness," said Fabio Mussi, parliamentary floor leader of the main government party, the left-wing PDS. "I urge all citizens of the north and especially those who vote for the League to make themselves heard and stop Bossi."

The revelations were a clear embarrassment to the Northern League, which has in recent years stopped all public talk of "oiling the Kalashnikovs" and tried to depict its campaign for independence for the affluent



WHAT OUR COMPETITORS BOLT-ON, WE BUILD-IN.

We aren't the only manufacturer who offers after sale services like these. But we're the only one who includes them all for free*.

If you think that increases our prices, take a look at the Opus PC shown here. You won't find anything remotely comparable for less money.

All Opus models are also PC '97 and Year 2000 compliant. So they won't have to take early retirement when the millennium arrives.

What's more, every Opus PC is covered by our free trouble-shooting Premier Support Line.

You get a lot more out of Opus, the Value Added Manufacturer.

*subject to the number of PCs ordered - ask for details.



OPUS POWER STATION 200M SYSTEM

- * Intel 200MHz Pentium® processor with MMX™ technology
- * Desktop Case
- * PC '97 Certified & Year 2000 Compliant
- * 32MB fast EDO RAM
- * 4.3GB fast IDE Ultra DMA HDD
- * 15" SVGA .28 Colour Monitor
- * 2MB 3-D 64bit High Performance Graphics Accelerator Card
- * 24x max CD ROM
- * MS Windows 95
- * 12 Months On-Site Parts & Labour Warranty

All trademarks acknowledged. Intel Inside Logo and Pentium are registered trademarks, and MMX is a trademark of the Intel Corporation. OT is a registered trademark of Opus Technology Limited. E & OE. Prices exclude delivery.

OPUS technology
VALUE ADDED MANUFACTURER

For more information or to place your order

0870 607 1288

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON THE VOTING SYSTEM

The Independent Commission on the Voting System, chaired by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, is seeking views on alternatives to the current "first-past-the-post" system of elections to the House of Commons.

The Commission would welcome reasoned submissions in writing from any person or organisation interested in the subject.

The Commission's terms of reference are:-

"The Commission will be free to consider and recommend any appropriate system or combination of systems in recommending an alternative to the present system for Parliamentary elections to be put before the people in the Government's referendum.

The Commission shall observe the requirement for broad proportionality, the need for stable government, an extension of voter choice and the maintenance of a link between MPs and geographical constituencies."

Written submissions should be brief, and sent soon (before the end of February, if at all possible) to the Independent Commission on the Voting System at:

6th Floor, Clive House, Petty France, LONDON SW1H 9HD
or e-mailed to: votingcom@holis.demon.co.uk

Tamil terror blights Prince's Sri Lanka visit

The Prince of Wales arrived in Sri Lanka yesterday to join in the celebrations of the war-torn country's 50th anniversary of independence. Our correspondent witnessed the start of a visit constrained by security anxieties.

As Prince Charles stood on the podium in Colombo airport this afternoon, cannon shots rang out in salute, and a stray dog, clearly convinced that it was about to die, sprinted flat out across the runway. Then the long grass in front of the guns burst into flames and a fire engine raced up to put them out. Finally, the band marched off playing the theme tune from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

It was a promising start to a royal visit which terror and scandal have reduced to a ceremonial skeleton. At a temple east of Colombo which the Prince visited later in the afternoon, one of the treasures he inspected is a statue of the Fastening Buddha, eyes sunk into their sockets, stomach no more than a hole, limbs reduced to fleshless tendons.

The Prince's four-day Sri Lanka tour is a bit like that. Gone is the excursion to the old royal capital of Kandy, the prettiest town in the country and its religious heart. Gone, for reasons of royal face, is the investiture of Arthur C Clarke, the science fiction author about whom claims have been made that he paid for sex with young boys. Various meetings with exponents of intermediate technology and the like were mooted, but security concerns ruled them out.

The Prince's first stop-off was at a new factory making men's underwear for Marks & Spencer, a joint venture between Courtaulds and local firms. He unveiled a plaque. Then at the 17th-century Raja Maha Viharaya temple he was swept up in a traditional temple procession with bare-chested drummers, women in shocking pink dresses waving fly whisks, and infant dancers in pointed hats. Escorted under a mammoth saffron parasol next to the abbot, he presented a plate of rose petals at the foot of a golden image of the Buddha of the Future inside the temple, and admired the wall paintings.

His arrival in the capital was a muted affair. The schoolchildren who were supposed to cheer and wave had been sent back to their studies lest one of them were to choose glorious martyrdom as a Tamil Tiger suicide bomber. So instead the streets were lined only with soldiers: some 10,000 have been deployed in Colombo over the anniversary period. This is a country which, thanks to the civil war, is celebrating 50 years of freedom through gritted teeth.

There is, however, far less touchiness about the colonial legacy of Sri Lanka than is found in, for example, India. Today, while the might of the country's armed forces rolls past Prince Charles in the official anniversary celebration, an alternative event in the hills east of Kandy will see the enthronement, at a place called Welassa, of an anti-British monk as the Prince of Welassa. Welassa - Wales, get it? The National Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations thinks the Prince should not have been invited and is staging the tongue-in-cheek event as a mild protest. But feelings amongst the population at large are not running high. Unlike in India, there was no freedom struggle in Sri Lanka: independence was handed them on a plate. Lord Salisbury is honoured as the father of the constitution. Prince Charles's arrival has caused little stir, but that is blamed on his lack of charisma. Were he to have brought his sons, William and Harry, it might have been different. When Diana, Princess of Wales died the grief here rivalled that in Britain.

It is rumoured that Prince Charles may steal time from his thin schedule to make a secret visit to Kandy, to inspect the damage that the Temple of the Sacred Tooth. If he were able to prowls about on his own he would find in Sri Lanka's streets numerous reminders of Britain of the Fifties: Morris Minor and Morris Oxford cars, advertisements for Lifebuoy and Sunlight soaps, Players Gold Leaf and Horlicks. Such a walkabout is very unlikely to happen, however, because as long as the Prince is in the country his safety will be a gigantic headache for the government. The temptation for the Tamil Tigers to punctuate his visit with a "spectacular" must be almost irresistible.



Royal chat: Prince Charles talking to children yesterday at the Kelaniya temple outside Colombo. Photograph: Reuters

هكذا من الأصل

Falklands talks deadlock

Sixteen years after the Falklands War, there is still no end in sight to the stalemate over the status of the islands. But, as Steve Crowshaw reports, there are hints of optimism in advance of a visit by the Argentine President later this year. Potential oil wealth could both help and hinder progress.

There was a mixture of optimism and dismay at a conference in London yesterday on the future of the Falkland Islands. All sides agreed on the need for dialogue. But there was agreement, too, that finding a way forward was difficult.

Rogelio Pfrter, the Argentine ambassador in London, said that his government was "fully committed to building bridges with the islands", but also admitted that a solution is "some way down the road".

The potential for economic development has transformed the outlook for the Falklands. Sheep-farming is no longer the only game in town. Oil prospects are still unclear - around a 30 per cent chance, according to one speaker yesterday. But John d'Ancona, a consultant with knowledge of the region, suggested that oil production of 100,000 barrels per day was not unrealistic. This, he speculated, could bring in income of £500,000 a day - thus transforming the islands' economy at a stroke. The possibility of diamonds deposits has also been raised.

Fishing is much more important than it was 20 years ago - and continues to be a source of both friction and co-operation. The co-operation has become necessary in order to ensure that stocks do not decline. But it is difficult to work out how to divide the fishing. Fish, as one speaker noted with some understatement, "do not observe man-made boundaries".

Argentina wants to put shared sovereignty on the table. Britain has so far been cautious. The islanders fear a sell-out. Sukey Cameron, representative in London of the Falkland Islands government, told yesterday's conference, organised by the South Atlantic Council, that the views of the islanders are regarded as "at best inconvenient, at worst unimportant".

Current Accounts

Use any cash machine in Britain.

Royal Bank current accounts now offer:

- access to every cash machine in Great Britain*
- no fees on agreed overdrafts†
- free 24 hour telephone banking.

Call into your local branch for details or call us on
0800 880 880
 quoting ref IN2 www.rbs.co.uk

Alternatively complete the information below and send to: The Royal Bank of Scotland plc, FREEPOST EH4233, Livingston, West Lothian EH54 5BR.

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____ POSTCODE _____ IN2

TEL NO: DAY _____ EVE _____

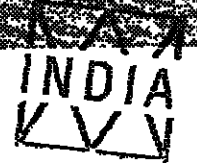
EXISTING CUSTOMER YES ☐ NO ☐

(We may telephone you to discuss your enquiry.)

The Royal Bank of Scotland

*Only applies to current accounts for personal customers. This includes all major cash machine networks. This does not apply to overdrafts of £15,000 or over for which arrangement fees and renewal fees are payable. Subject to age, status and prior agreement. Written quotations available. Calls may be recorded. The Royal Bank of Scotland plc. Registered Office: 36 St. Andrew Square, Edinburgh EH2 2YB. Registered in Scotland No. 90312.

Up to £200
off top name
holidays
when you
switch to
Barclaycard



Thinking of booking your Summer holiday? Then switch to Barclaycard. Not just for the free Travel Accident Insurance. Or because you can use it in more than 14 million places and over a quarter of a million cash machines worldwide. But because we can save you up to £200 on hundreds of 1998/99 holidays.*

Simply transfer the balance on your existing credit or storecards to Barclaycard. And receive your discount voucher once your Barclaycard account is opened. It's that simple!

Call 0800 49 29 29

for full
written details.
Please quote
code 004BG

Lines are open
24 hours

I would like to transfer my balance;
please send me full written details and
an application form. 004BG

Send to: Barclaycard, FREEPOST, BS 4335, Bristol BS13 7YX

BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

Title _____ Surname _____ First Names _____
 Address _____
 Postcode _____
 Telephone _____

don't put it off put it on **BARCLAYCARD**

www.barclaycard.co.uk
 Barclaycard Bank PLC. Registered in London, England Reg No 206672. Registered Office: 54 Lombard Street, London EC3P 3JL.
 *Travel voucher offer only available to new Barclaycard account holders. One voucher per account. Discount voucher can only be redeemed against holidays costing a total of £750 or more. Further terms and conditions will apply.

هكذا من الأصل

Blair heads for US and a sexually challenged mission

A battle between sex and substance will be fought out between the media, President Bill Clinton and Tony Blair when the Prime Minister flies out to Washington this evening. Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, reports on the build-up to the three-day visit.

While the President and Mr Blair will attempt to concentrate on the big picture issues of Iraq, Northern Ireland, the Asia "meltdown", work and welfare, education and health, the Monica Lewinsky question will be lurking – and is bound to be put when the two men stage a joint press conference at the White House on Friday.

At one London briefing on the visit this week, the question was even raised by the *Financial Times*, and in an exchange with a BBC correspondent yesterday, the Prime Minister's official spokesman said: "I fear the BBC has decided that Lewinsky is the story, but we will have to live with that."

When the BBC man pressed the question again, he was told that if he asked Mr Blair about Ms Lewinsky on Friday: "The answer will be that Monica whatever her name is, I don't think will figure in his answer. He will refer to the excellent job that the President is doing and the excellent judgement of the American people in appearing to put this stuff in its proper perspective."

In a London briefing with American correspondents on Monday, Mr Blair said such distractions were "part of modern political life", but it was greatly to the President's credit that he had not been distracted.

Urging the media to have a sense of perspective and balance, Mr Blair added that there was a difference between the interest, "sometimes an interest bordering on an obsession", with people's personal lives and issues of huge importance to the world.

Asked about Iraq – one such issue, high on the Washington talks agenda – Mr Blair said the objective was to make sure that Saddam Hussein complied with United Nations

resolutions on inspection. "This is not a situation," he said, "in which the UN inspectors have been there trying to find evidence of evil intent on the part of Saddam Hussein. The evidence is there."

"They have uncovered masses and masses of weapons: 48 Scud missiles; 38,000 chemical weapons munitions; 3,000 tonnes of chemical weapon precursors; a large biological weapons manufacturing plant."

"These are actual things that they have uncovered and stopped, which is the reason why we are so intent on bringing him back into line and allowing the inspectors back in to do their work in the future, because obviously our concern is that if we don't do that, then he may be developing further weapons of mass destruction."

Against that background, one of the issues raised at yesterday's Number 10 briefing was whether Cherie Booth would be taking a hairdresser with her. The Prime Minister's official spokesman said: "I honestly am not aware of her follicular arrangements."

LEWINSKY'S THREE DOZEN WHITE HOUSE VISITS

The hue and cry over President Bill Clinton's alleged relationship with the White House trainee, Monica Lewinsky, had subsided sufficiently yesterday for Ms Lewinsky and her lawyer, William Ginsburg, finally to leave Washington for California. But new evidence about the extent of contacts between the President and the trainee he had referred to as "that woman" in his televised denial last week indicated that his difficulties were far from over.

In a front-page report, the *New York Times* said that Ms Lewinsky

visited the White House more than three dozen times after being transferred from her job in the legislative affairs department there to the Pentagon in April 1996. Officials at the Pentagon said that her visits were not connected to her work.

Quoting White House logs (which its reporters had been told of, but had not seen), the *New York Times* said Ms Lewinsky was cleared for entry – no easy feat – on 37 occasions between April 1996 and December 1997. The last recorded time was on 28 December.

Mostly, clearance had been given by Mr Clinton's personal secretary, Betty Currie.

Ms Currie's desk is just outside the Oval office, and she acted effectively as gatekeeper, granting or denying access and screening telephone calls. Ms Currie was called to testify last week in the investigation into the Lewinsky case being conducted by the independent prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, but volunteered no information about what she said.

— Mary Dejevsky, Washington



Supporters in Washington commemorate those who died of Aids. The three-drug cocktail has brought hope

Photograph: Costa Manos/Magnum

New threat mars fall in American Aids deaths

Deaths from Aids across the US fell 44 per cent in the first half of last year, showing the power of new drug cocktails. But Jeremy Laurance, Health Editor, says evidence about the origins of the epidemic suggest the virus could pose a new threat.

"We can't see the end of the epidemic but it is the beginning of a new era," Dr Kevin DeCock told the world's largest annual Aids conference in Chicago yesterday.

His optimism is understandable. Dr DeCock of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta was commenting on new figures which show that Aids is being successfully curbed with the three-drug combinations introduced two years ago. A diagnosis that was a death sentence has become a chronic condition compatible with a near normal life.

Figures presented at the fifth conference on retroviruses and opportunistic infections show that US deaths from Aids peaked in 1994 and 1995 and then nosed downwards in 1996. Last year the fall accelerated.

In the first half of 1997, 12,040 Americans died of Aids compared with 21,460 in the first half of 1996. Figures for the whole of 1997, only available for New York where 16 per cent of the country's Aids patients live, show an even bigger decline at 48 per cent. Both men and women and people of all races are benefiting.

The three-drug cocktails – two older Aids drugs such as AZT plus one of the newer protease inhibitors – have revolutionised Aids care. Typically, people start on them as soon as they learn they are infected, before they get ill. The treatment drives the level of virus in the blood so low that

it is undetectable and many patients remain well. It does not work for all, however, and patients have to take around 20 pills a day at precise times.

Some specialists fear that the decline may only be a lull and that deaths will rise again as the effect of the new treatments wears off. Dr Harold Jaffe of the Centers for Disease Control said: "Are we in a honeymoon period? Is there something bad on the horizon?"

The total number of Americans living with Aids is up 13 per cent to 259,000. Between 400,000 and 650,000 are estimated to be infected with HIV.

In a separate development,

scientists from Rockefeller University in New York reported in *Nature* that they have traced the origin of the disease from a genetic analysis of HIV positive blood plasma taken from an African man in 1959. The form of the virus recovered was at an early stage of its evolution.

This suggested that the single virus which founded the epidemic existed 10 to 15 years earlier, around or just after the Second World War. The scientists warned that the rapid evolution of HIV-1 in the past 40 or 50 years heralded even greater diversification in the future, underscoring "the need for continued surveillance".

HEALTH INSURANCE

Cut the cost,
not the cover.

Call 0800 77 99 55

to find out more about Primicare, quoting ref 0807/97

Prime Health

Pay less for quality
health insurance.

THE INDEPENDENT

WIN

Babylon 5 on video
volumes 31 & 32

An absolute must for Babylon 5 fans, a chance to win the final two volumes from the third series of this hugely successful sci-fi show. All the tensions apparent in previous episodes erupt in the following thrilling episodes:

GREY 17 IS MISSING - What could possibly be if interest at level Grey 17? When Garibaldi digs a little too deeply into the mystery he finds more than he bargained for.

AND THE ROCK CRIED OUT NO HIDING PLACE - The intrigue between Centauri nobles sets to enter a lethal endgame which will only conclude with the death of one of the rivals.

SHADOW DANCING - The Shadows are driving refugees into one area to alienate them and only a showdown between the two largest battle fleets in the Galaxy.

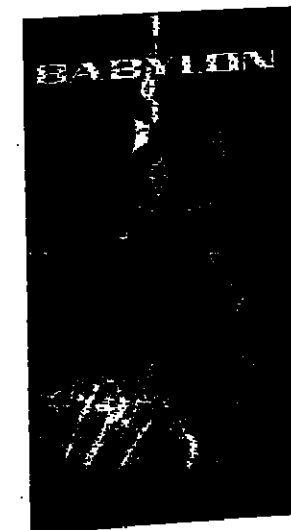
ZHADUM - What awful secret from the past has

returned to compel Sheridan to visit the place where he knows he will die?

We have 15 Babylon 5 video sets (volumes 31 & 32) to win - courtesy of Warner Home Video. To enter this competition simply dial the number below, answer the following question on line and leave your name and full address:

Q: Name the actor who plays Captain John Sheridan in Babylon 5.

Call 0930 564 613



STEVEN PINKER

HOW THE MIND WORKS

'The genius of Pinker's book lies in his account of just how amazing a machine the human mind is ... deserves to be another smash hit.'

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

'He writes with the comic verve of Martin Amis or Woody Allen'

THE TIMES

'Witty, lucid and ultimately enthralling'

THE OBSERVER

'Erudite, stimulating and provocative'

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

'Big, brash and a lot fun'

TIME MAGAZINE

'A glittering tour de force'

SPECTATOR

ALLEN LANE THE PENGUIN PRESS

NEWS SPORT WHAT'S ON THE INTERNET

"This is a truly modern online service...delivering topical and relevant content."

"The integration between its own content and the web is seamless."

"LineOne is an ideal option for home users."

"For a first-time user, LineOne is a valuable introduction to the Net."

Before you choose an Internet service, check out

LineOne	15 stars
Compuserve	15 stars
AOL	12 stars
MSN	12 stars

00 111 210

It's what you want to know

Calls are charged at BT local rates. Different rates may apply to calls from non-BT networks.

Calvin Klein look Gold short sleeve polo neck, £60, black satin pedal pushers, £60, from French Connection, 249 Regent Street, London W1 and branches nationwide. enquiries 0171-399 7200.

an heirloom you're after, then invest in MacDonald, McCartney or Williamson. For a bit of one-season fashion frippery, however, take a look at your local high street and snap up some well-informed bargains.

and daytime phone number. The first three out of the bag will win.
Photograph by Ben Elwes



Young at heart: Age Concern's poster featuring 56-year-old Pearl Read, challenging perceptions of older women in the workplace

Go on, show us your bra

A glimpse of something shocking has long ceased to be, well, shocking. Now it's age that catches our eye. Kathy Marks on the latest users of underwear as outerwear.

It is an arresting image. A 56-year-old woman in a plunging brassiere gazes down from a billboard, in a pose reminiscent of Eva Herzigova in the infamous Wonderbra advertisements.

This time the message is political, not sexual. The charity Age Concern is making a point about our perceptions of older women as part of its campaign against age discrimination at work. The slogan on the poster reads: "The first thing some people notice is her age."

It is, nonetheless, an unsettling sight. True, this is an exceptionally attractive and well-preserved 56-year-old who could easily shave a decade off her age. But she patently lacks the bloom of youth of the stereotypical lingerie model, and thus subverts the Herzigova ad - which is what Age Concern intended.

There is an intriguing subtext to this poster beyond its call for equality. Its shock value lies in the fact that it features an older model, not that it shows a woman in a revealing brassiere. So ubiquitous are such portraits now that we barely raise an eyebrow. Fashion, advertising and evolving social attitudes have combined to anaesthetise us to images that were once confined to the bedroom.

Style may be ephemeral, but it reflects more profound cultural changes. So when Madonna appeared in an exaggeratedly pointy bra designed by John Paul Gaultier in the early 1990s, it was not just a fashion joke; it caught the imagination. The bra, after all, is a sexy and beautiful garment

which clothes the sexiest and most beautiful part of the female body. The Gaultier bra, together with similar confections by Vivienne Westwood, coincided with the relaunch of the Wonderbra, embraced by legions of admirers for its push-up and cleavage-enhancing properties. Soon women were turning up at nightclubs and art exhibitions wearing little more above their waists than a frothy black bra.

The "underwear as outerwear" trend appears to be here to stay. Dawn French, the generously endowed comedienne, turned up on *TFI Friday* last week wearing a big white bra over her T-shirt, and invited members of the audience to remove it with one hand.

Marcelle D'Argy Smith, editor of *Woman's Journal* magazine, says: "Women want to show off their bodies in a way that they never did in the past. It is no longer shocking to see a woman wearing a skimpy bra with a transparent blouse on top; it is not even deemed inappropriate at work. And it's not necessarily a 'come hither' thing: it is very pretty and feminine."

Tongue at least partly in cheek, she adds: "We really do have the best of both worlds now. We can wear what we want, and if a man comes too close, we can throw the sexual harassment rulebook in his face."

It was all very different in 1914, when Mary Phelps Jacobs, an American socialite, decided that she was fed up with her uncomfortable corset and, with the help of her French maid, tied two handkerchiefs together with pink ribbon. Thus was the early brassiere born. But it was not until 1925 that it was designed with individual cups and adjustable straps, and only in 1938 were variations in cup size introduced.

Manufacturers and advertisers realised long ago that the bra is much more than just a functional scrap of lace and cot-

ton. It is, in fact, a garment that is central to women's self-image at every life stage. In adolescence, girls are desperate to get into their first bras in order to prove their feminine credentials. Early boyfriends are irrevocably associated with fumbling to get them undone. The start of a more mature affair necessitates the purchase of something new and erotic. Pregnancy signals the start of

a bewildering succession of ever more voluminous versions. Breast-feeding means those clever ones with unhookable cups for easy access. Dr Martin Skinner, a social psychologist at the University of Warwick, says: "The history of art and fashion reflect the changing ways in which women's breasts have been covered, revealed and accentuated through the ages. By definition, the bra is an icon of femininity. That's why bra-burning by early feminists was such a potent symbol; the bra was seen as an object of restraint and repression. Now I suppose you could say that women have given in to constraint in the name of freedom."

If modern feminists can wear lipstick without being accused of treachery to the cause, as the writer Natasha Walter asserted in a recent book, *The New Feminism*, then they can, too, wear provocative bras with no qualms. And they do wear them, if the success of lingerie stores such as Agent Provocateur is anything to go by. Even Marks & Spencer, which once had an extremely straitlaced range, has introduced whole racks of skimpy and slinky numbers.

British women, once lambasted for their reluctance to splash out on underwear, particularly compared with their Continental counterparts, are spending twice as much on it now as a decade ago. The bra business alone is worth £500m a year. "More and more women are prepared to spend that bit extra," says Jill Kenton, manager of Rigby and Peller, corsetiers to the Queen, whose made-to-measure bras cost up to £400.

Breast sizes, too, have grown larger over the years, thanks to healthier lifestyles, better nutrition and the contraceptive Pill. In the past 10 years, the average bust has advanced from a 34B to a 36C. Manufacturers have responded with larger-cup ranges. The

success of Sophie Dahl, the voluptuously-proportioned supermodel, suggests that fashion may be turning away from women with ironing-board figures.

And towards older women? The other interesting point about the Age Concern poster is that it suggests that the nubile young girls who rule the roost in fashion and advertising may not, after all, have a monopoly on allure, that post-menopausal, wrinkled women are equally legitimate sexual beings.

This was the signal that artist Melanie Manchot sought to send when she plastered huge posters of her 66-year-old mother, dressed in her underwear, on hoardings outside a busy Underground station in London last month. Sexualisation of the older woman may be starting to catch on. The charms of veteran actresses such as Helen Mirren, 51, are regularly lauded. *Dazed and Confused*, the men's magazine, published close-up shots of women in their sixties, seventies and eighties, clad only in their underwear, in its issue last month.

The increasingly explicit, unabashedly sexy advertisements of recent years have given the bra a great deal of exposure and helped it emerge from beneath layers of outer clothes. In some ways, this is a welcome development. Perhaps a garment that defines women's shape more than any other - and is also a powerful symbol of femininity, evoking both motherhood and sexual attraction - should not be coyly concealed.

And if Pearl Read, the Age Concern model, has managed to push the boundaries that little bit further, she may be just the right woman for the job. Ten years ago she brought a ball in Berkeley Square to a standstill when she suddenly unfasted her halter-neck top and gave her astounded fellow guests an unfettered view of her breasts.



BELOVED AND BONK Diary of a divorce

Divorce is like a big pile of manure dropped on life's path. You have to dig every last bit of it out of the way before you can move forward: miss any and it'll stick to the soles of your feet and smell for the rest of your journey.

I had imagined that there wasn't that much more shit to shovel: the decree absolute was done, Beloved and I both getting on in new relationships, the kids - Buster's Celtic Soul notwithstanding - settling into some kind of new routine. Somewhere far off I thought I could hear a very fat lady clearing her throat. Come springtime I said to myself she'll be hitting the high notes like Callas before she met Onassis. It will all be over by Easter and we can stop living with constantly elevated pulse rates and a feeling of doom-held-off-for-one-more-day.

Hah! This particular bout of poop clearance is, it seems, like football: a game with two halves. What I thought was the final whistle turns out to have been just half time. In spite of getting the result from this match that he wanted, Beloved still wants to score some more goals.

So when Very Nice Chap (VNC) and I returned home with the kids after our weekend away there was an e-mail waiting for me: small, and as poison-packed as a black widow.

Now, I realise in the wider context of the things ex-husbands do, a nasty one-liner is pretty small beer. Poison pen letters, stalking and threats of physical violence are the order of the day when it comes to recently divorced boys. In fact

when I rang my best mate and told her with trembling voice what had happened, she said that I should be thankful that he hadn't come and beaten me up and spat on me, as had her neighbour's ex. But a single vicious assertion from a man who could only watch *Silence of the Lambs* fast forward between his fingers, who can get colicky babies to sleep inside 10 seconds, and lose an egg and spoon race with style, is like a brickbat in the face from an ordinary chap. It's very scary. If he can do something so out of character what else

might he do? Plant Semtex round my snowdrops? Have a private detective spy on me from my vibrator?

Now, when I hear our dog growl in the night I wonder if it really is badgers on the compost again, or Beloved, driven by murderous and vengeful intent. I'm scared to go downstairs at night and crossing the yard to the garage in the dark has become as big a deal as it was when I was seven. I've spent the past couple of nights dreaming of Beloved coming after me and VNC with a sawn-off shotgun (also featuring in the dream were some miniature turkeys, flocking around our feet as Beloved finally blew us both away, but that's dreams for you, doing something frivolous to distract you from the main feature). I was woken

up by the sound of whimpering and looked for the source all over the house until I clocked that it had been me.

Every friend who has been through divorce told me that I would get indifferent to Beloved. It was like your parents telling you that one day you'd understand why grown-ups just lie down on beaches. I didn't even want to believe it. I still don't want to. I want to believe that our donkey's years of marriage could be put to good use as the basis for at least civility. At best a kind of friendship. I'd like to feel approved of. I'd like to be able to tell Beloved about my new life and hear about his.

Maybe I won't have to believe in indifference if I just wait for the end of the second half and extra time. After all, I was bonkers and angry in the first half, now it's Beloved's turn to kick the ball into an empty goal and throw things; I should just keep my head down. Or maybe by the time Beloved has cleared his own pile of manure from the path, by chucking it at me, things will have changed again, and I'll be glad to regard him with as much interest as a patch of drying paint. I really hope not.

Stevie Morgan

Can you write the story of the year for six to nine year olds?

Win £2,000 and have your story published

The Independent Scholastic Story of the Year Competition, now in its sixth successful year, aims to encourage top writing for the very difficult to please six- to nine-year-old age group. To help you meet the challenge, some of our most successful novelists and scriptwriters will be explaining how they set

THE INDEPENDENT
Story of the Year 6
SCHOLASTIC

about writing a page-turning narrative. This week, Jilly Cooper, international bestselling author of *Riders*, *Polo* and *Assassination*, tells Nicola Veash about her approach to storytelling from her copious research and detailed outlines to the vital ingredients of a good love story, characterisation and humour.

'I submerge myself in what I'm writing'

I started writing love stories for a magazine and eventually turned these 16,000-word serials into novels. I tend to write about things I am interested in. So in the 1970s I wrote a novel about showjumping because I've always loved horses. I finished the first draft of *Riders* but then lost the manuscript on a bus. I was devastated and I didn't have the heart to start again. So I just mooned around the show-jumping circuit for years, until I felt ready to try again.



Jilly Cooper: lost first manuscript on a bus

I have always done masses of research for my books. Sometimes this can take years. I tend to submerge myself in the world I am writing about. When I wrote *Rivals* I totally lived in the television world. But I end up having miles more material than I need, which can be a problem. I'm actually trying to cut down on the amount of research I do, because it wastes so much time.

I've always been fascinated by my characters. I write about 10 pages of notes on each one, more if it's a main character. I write everything down. Speech, characteristics, funny quirks. When a character is right the dialogue starts writing itself.

In keeping with my need to be absolutely prepared before I start writing, I always draft a really long synopsis for my books. I feel I've got to get to grips with everything in the novel before starting. When I'm in full flow I tend to add bits here and there, going back to chapters I'm not happy with.

I try to end each chapter on an exciting

note and I think the key to keeping the plot moving is to make it unexpected. Hopefully people like characters and they like reading because they want to know what happens to the I like writing about love and sexy people and I must have some strength of character. My problem is now writing the sixth series, so I have far many characters, which makes things very confusing. That is why clarity before you start is important.

I loved reading as child and books have always been hugely important to me. I adore Nancy Mitford, Anthony Powell, Jane Austen - all very funny writers who experts at portraying social nuances.

I hope my books are a good read and like knickerbocker glories, they have something for everyone. I find that people adore love stories with happy endings that is just the sort of book I like writing, some love stories can be a bit heavy, so ways put in lots of jokes and lots about nature. I can't describe houses and things; that, but descriptions of people, animals, flora comes easily to me.

I used to love reading to my children when they were younger. They adored Beatrix Potter and *Wind in the Willows*. Spending time reading was really important to us. You know my mother used to read aloud to me and was absolutely brilliant. I think if you're enough to children they start to really enjoy books and eventually read to themselves.

COMPETITION RULES

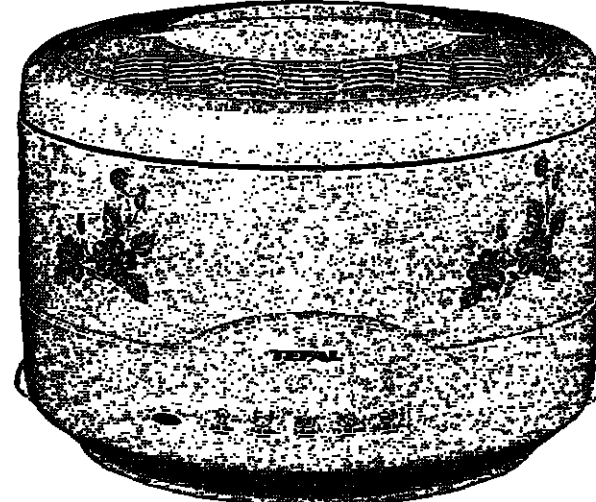
Story of the Year 6 offers a £2,000 prize for the winner, with £500 each for two runners up. The top 10 stories will be published in an anthology by Scholastic Children's Books. You are invited to submit stories of 1,500-2,500 words which must arrive on or before 28 February 1998 at: PO BOX 2302 - LONDON - WC1A 1PE. You may enter only once and entries must be made by the writer, not on his/her behalf. Entries must be typewritten, double-spaced and on one side of the paper only. We will not accept stories with illustrations. Manuscripts will not be returned, so please keep a copy. All entries must be unpublished, but published writers may enter with new material. Each entry must be submitted with both a cover page and title page. The cover page must feature the story title, and the writer's name, address and telephone number. The title page must feature only the title of the story. The story should start on a new page, and the author's name must not feature on any of these pages, so that all entries can be judged anonymously. The winning story will be published in *The Independent* subsequent to the final judging of the competition which concludes on 22 May 1998. The top three stories and up to 10 others will be published

in the autumn. In the anthology *Story of the Year 6* by Scholastic Children's Books. The competition is not open to employees of, or relatives of employees of Scholastic Ltd or Newspapers Publishing plc or anyone connected with the competition. If posing cannot be accepted as proof of delivery, no responsibility can be accepted for entries which are damaged, mislaid or wrongly delivered. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered. Entry grants to Scholastic Ltd the exclusive right to publish an entrant's story in all formats throughout the world for the full legal term of copyright. A copy of the contract may be obtained on application to Scholastic Ltd. By submitting an entry an entrant agrees to be bound by the terms of and to sign this agreement if called to do so. Any story chosen for publication in the anthology that does not win one of the top three cash prizes will receive a fee of £200. Any entry not submitted in form specified will be deemed invalid. If your story is published in the anthology or in the newspaper by the end of December 1998, these rights revert to you. Entry in this competition implies acceptance of these rules.

Product Recall Notice

Tefal Country Lane Deep Fryer
Exclusively produced for Woolworths
(£24.99)

Reference Code: 611283



Woolworths and Tefal have learned of a potential safety fault with its Tefal Country Lane Deep Fryer (code 611283).

In the interests of customer safety and as a precautionary measure, the Deep Fryer has been withdrawn from sale in all Woolworths stores.

Any customer who has purchased this product since 20th October 1997 should return it to their nearest store where a full refund will be given. A receipt is not necessary. No other products in the Woolworths Country Lane range are affected.

WOOLWORTHS

The Right Rev Lesslie Newbigin

James Edward Lesslie Newbigin, missionary and minister of the church born in Newcastle upon Tyne 8 December 1909; ordained 1936; Bishop in Madras and Ramnad, Church of South India 1947-59; Bishop in Madras 1965-74; CBE 1974; Lecturer in Theology, Selby Oak College, Birmingham 1974-79; minister, United Reformed Church, Winton Green 1980-88; married 1936 Helen Henderson (one son, three daughters); died London 30 January 1998.

Some years ago a prominent Roman Catholic theologian, who first knew Lesslie Newbigin at Vatican II, referred to this prominent Presbyterian as his father in God and spoke warmly of his missionary work, missionary thinking and varied publications. In response to protestant surprise he said "Who else is there?"

Born in Northumbria to an English Presbyterian family, James Edward Lesslie Newbigin studied in a southern Quaker school, Leighton Park, before going to Cambridge. Studying economics under J.M. Keynes in preparation for work in his father's shipping business, he slowly left behind youthful doubt and then suddenly decided to prepare for ministerial ordination.

Partly to pay for the required theological training he worked for some time with the missionary minded Student Christian Movement where he met Helen Henderson whom he later married and with whom he lived happily ever after. In 1933 he returned to Cambridge for theology where he pursued his own line of thinking rather than prescribed courses. In 1936, he and Helen sailed for India as Church of Scotland missionaries, most of the journey being spent on finishing his first book, *Christian Freedom in the Modern World* (1937).

Appointed to the Madras area, he quickly demonstrated his phenomenal gift of excellence in whatever he attempted. He was linguist, administrator, ecclesiastic, theologian, missionary, preacher, pastor, epistemologist, author, limerick

writer, rock climber and doughty fighter, but all his talents were used in the service of his missionary evangelistic vocation. He was a village evangelist who did it the hard way. So hard that a bus accident and then more than ten operations brought him back to England for a time. Returning to India he was one of the architects of the Church of South India and became one of its first bishops when he was appointed in 1947 to Madras and Ramnad. This "presbyterian" bishop produced a new understanding of episcopacy and many influential books such as *South India Diary* (1951), *The Reunion of the Church* (1948), *The Household of God* (1953) and *Sin and Salvation* (1956) - translated from the original Tamil.

In 1959, he was persuaded to become general secretary of the International Missionary Council



Newbigin: missionary zeal

and saw its integration into the World Council of Churches, of which he became an associate general secretary. With some relief he left Geneva on his appointment in 1965, as Bishop of Madras where he remained until retirement in 1974. Like William Temple, Newbigin wrote a wonderful commentary on the Gospel of John, *The Light Has Come* (1982), and was deeply involved in social and political issues. The chapter in his autobiography *Unfinished Agenda* (1985) on the Madras years is headed "Madras: Mission in Metropolis"; later, dissatisfied with the theology of the Anglican Faith in the City, he wrote the theological chapter in *Faith in the City of Birmingham* (1988). His last 20 years were devoted to

proclaiming the gospel as "public truth", in the public domain because it is not just religiously true but true all the way down.

In 1974, with two suitcases and a rucksack, he and Helen boarded countless local buses until they reached England. There they settled in Birmingham where Newbigin taught missionary theology in the Selby Oak College for five years, became minister of a church opposite Winton Green prison, moderator of the United Reformed Church, preached at Balmoral, worked with Holy Trinity, Brompton and began to write what might be his most influential books, *The Other Side of 1984* (1983), *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989).

He cried ceaselessly for a missionary encounter with our brilliant but pagan western culture. Indians with all their problems could hear the gospel and had hope; England seemed deaf to the gospel and short on hope. Europeans were good missionaries everywhere else but Europe. Post-Enlightenment culture was so hostile to the gospel that unless it was redeemed, the Church was in hazard.

Books, papers, lectures and pamphlets poured from the small typewriter which, owing to his failing eye-sight, slowly forgot how to spell. The old wounds of 50 years ago flared up, he could not read and had to be read to. He could no longer drive but there were still buses and a white stick. Danger did not exist, he would still travel, still talk and still pray.

Throughout his life whatever he touched Lesslie Newbigin adorned and advanced, but his final gift was something new: a new mission to a hopeless culture, for which he gave his all. Motivated by his lack of hope he faced it full of hope in the Christian good news. The movement he started, embodied in *The Gospel and Our Culture*, now has international ramifications and in England has been incorporated into the Bible Society. His brilliance, pastoral care and missionary zeal were all present in the two "sermons" he preached to intensive care a few hours before he died.

- H. Dan Beeby



Mayne effectively bares fangs in *Dance of the Vampires* (1967), with Sharon Tate

Photograph: Kobal

Ferdie Mayne

Ferdinand Phillip Mayer-Horckel (Ferdie Mayne), actor: born Mayence, Germany 11 March 1916; married 1950 Deirdre de Peyer (two daughters; marriage dissolved 1976); died Lordington, West Sussex 30 January 1998.

A master of charmingly sly villainy, the tall dark and urbane actor Ferdie Mayne will be remembered for the effective menace he provided in countless films and television shows in his 60-year career, though his versatility extended well beyond portraying suave duplicity, to include comedies, musicals and classic plays (his favourite role was Trigorin in *The Seagull*).

He was born Ferdinand Mayer-Horckel in Mayence, Germany in 1916. His father was the Judge of Mayence and his mother, who was half-English, a singing teacher. Since the family was Jewish, the teenage Ferdinand was sent to England in 1932 to stay with his aunt Lee Hutchinson, a noted photographer and sculptress.

He attended Frensham Heights School prior to training for the stage at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Old Vic School. His first stage appearance was as the White Knight

in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* with the West Croydon Repertory Company, but most of his early work came in radio - his fluent German put him in demand for propaganda broadcasts during the Second World War.

His parents had been briefly interned in Buchenwald but were fortunate enough, due to his mother's lineage, to get to England before the outbreak of war. Mayne's first West End appearance was in a German role, as Kurt Muller in Lillian Hellman's powerful anti-Fascist play *Watch on the Rhine* at the Aldwych (1943), the same year that he made his screen debut (billed as Ferdi) in *Old Mother Riley Overseas*.

In the highly prolific career that followed, Mayne appeared in over 80 films. In one of his earliest, *Prelude to Fame* (1950), as the hearty peasant father of a child prodigy, he was enormously touching in the scene in which he realises he must temporarily give his son up to the wealthy socialite who can develop the boy's talent.

Though Mayne's singing in the film was dubbed, he possessed a fine baritone voice which he displayed to effect in several West End musicals. It was while appearing in the musical *Belinda Fair* (1949) that he

met the actress Deirdre de Peyer who became his wife - they named their first daughter Belinda in memory of the show - and though they divorced in 1976 they remained close.

He later played a feature role in Richard Rodgers' musical *No Strings* (1963) in which as the bored millionaire dilettante Louis de Pourtal he had a solo number "The Man Who Has Everything (has nothing)", and in 1965 he took over the role of Max in the long-running Rodgers and Hammerstein hit *The Sound of Music*.

Other stage work included the role of the German officer Hauptmann Schultz in *Albert RN* (1952), the true-life story (later filmed) of prisoners-of-war who substituted a dummy during roll-call for an escaping officer, and Judge Advocate Kunz in John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* (1965) at the Royal Court.

On screen he was a sheikh in the delightful comedy *The Captain's Paradise* (1953) in which Alec Guinness maintained two contrasting wives, one in North Africa and the other in Gibraltar, and in the epic *Ben-Hur* (1959) played the captain of the vessel which rescues the hero from the wreck of the galley ship. Mayne effectively bared fangs in Roman Pol-

sky's parody of Dracula movies, *Dance of the Vampires* (1967), an unsuitable farce which, despite a mixed reception on its initial release, has become a cult favourite, and Polanski used him again in *The Pirates* (1986), an equally broad pastiche of swash-bucklers.

In the war adventure *Where Eagles Dare* (1968) Mayne had an important role as a traditionalist Nazi general trying to curb the more vicious excesses of the Gestapo, and he worked with Kubrick in *Barry Lyndon* (1975). His television credits included a leading role in *Epitaph for a Spy* (1953), a six-part adaptation of Eric Ambler's espionage story, and a regular role as a chef in the series *The Royalty* (1957-58), which starred Margaret Lockwood as the owner of a luxury hotel.

In recent years Mayne filmed frequently in Europe (he was a particular favourite of German audiences) and in the mid-1970s he settled in America, working consistently until two years ago on television and in such films as *The Black Stallion Returns* (1983) and *Conan the Destroyer* (1984), but with the onset of Parkinson's Disease he returned to England to be near his family.

- Tom Vonnace

George Marks

William George Marks, footballer: born Figheldean, Wiltshire 9 April 1915; played for Arsenal 1936-46, Blackburn Rovers 1946-48, Bristol City 1948, Reading 1948-53; married; died Salisbury, Wiltshire 22 January 1998.

Five thousand pounds would barely buy a day's labour from a top footballer today, yet in 1946 it was enough to make George Marks the world's most expensive goalkeeper.

Curiously in such record-breaking circumstances, his transfer from Arsenal to Blackburn Rovers came about because he was no longer wanted by the Gunners, his best years having been lost to the Second World War.

Though he played only two League games for the north Londoners - whom he had joined from the amateur side Salisbury Corinthians in 1936 - he finished the season of 1938/39 as their first-choice keeper, then went on to help them win the Football League South Cup in 1942/43. Most notably, though, he highlighted his potential by representing England in eight wartime international matches between 1941 and 1943.

Official caps were not awarded for these matches, availability of players being something of a lottery at the time, yet Marks's selection for his country alongside the likes of Stanley Matthews and Tommy Lawton reflected the immense regard in which he was held and proved he was one of the most accomplished net-minders of his era.

However Marks, who had



Marks: expensive goalkeeper

served with the RAF during the war, lost his Highbury place to George Swindin in January 1946 after failing to gain leave to play in an FA Cup tie. Seven months later came the move to Blackburn, for whom he played magnificently for half a season before suffering a severe jaw injury. Thereafter a combination of fluctuating form and the fact that he lived and trained in his native West Country combined to bring about a transfer to Bristol City in August 1948.

Two months later Marks, now 33, signed for Reading whom he served nobly in the old Third Division South until 1953. There followed two years as a trainer-coach at Elm Park before he left the professional game, no doubt wondering what might have been had the war not coincided with his footballing pomp.

Marks, a delightfully modest fellow, spent the remainder of his working life as a local government officer in his native Wiltshire.

- Ivon Ponting



'Doc Mac': dour struggle for Scottish independence

Dr Robert McIntyre

Robert Douglas McIntyre, physician and politician: born Dalziel, Lanarkshire 15 December 1913; married 1954 Lotitia Macleod (one son); MP (Scottish Nationalist), Motherwell and Wishaw 1945; Chairman, Scottish National Party 1948-56; President 1958-80; died Strirling 2 February 1998.

Dr Robert McIntyre is regarded as the father of the SNP. He had the distinction of being the Scottish National Party's first MP and remained for the next 50 years the friend and mentor of its members and leadership. Towards the end of the Sec-

ond World War, in April 1945, he won Motherwell at a by-election and held it until the General Election that July; he packed many speeches into his three months at Westminster; those on education and Scotland ring as true today as then.

He took the straightforward view, shared nowadays by more and more voters, that it is absurd for Scotland to be ruled from England, and he welcomed Scotland's entry to the European Union as a full member like Belgium, Ireland, Finland, and other small countries.

The press at the time (never a friend of the SNP) accused him wrongly of refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to the

Crown. In fact, he could not find the requisite two sponsors. So he walked down to the Speaker's chair alone. The Speaker refused to recognise him. This episode reflected badly on the House of Commons and two sponsors did emerge.

A son of the manse, McIntyre qualified as a doctor at Edinburgh University and specialised in chest complaints. He went on to be consultant chest physician for Stirlingshire and Clackmannan from 1951 to 1979. As so often happens, he died of his own speciality.

During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s he built up the party throughout Scotland, standing as a parliamentary candidate in every

general election from 1945 to 1974 and in a by-election in 1971 - 13 times. He also encouraged activists to stand as candidates. I was one of them. My first political speech was given in his constituency in his presence, and this led to my name being put forward for the by-election at Hamilton in November 1967. He was always willing to give me advice on all political matters, particularly as to how to cope as a lone SNP MP with benches of Labour MPs from Scotland whose behaviour I found despicable.

The SNP now contest every Westminster seat. But it was not always the case. I remember how movingly McIntyre spoke at a meeting in a room in Str-

ling packed with SNP candidates. "Once I had to use all the arts of persuasion to find one man or one woman to stand so that I would not be our only candidate. Now when I look around this room, for the first time I know in my heart we shall win Scotland free." *Punch* once carried a cartoon of him brandishing a sword with the caption, "McIntyre Alone".

McIntyre had an intense love of sailing. He was known to all in the Scottish National Party as "Doc Mac", and admired by us and by thousands of Scots for his dour struggle for our independence through all the wilderness years.

- Winifred M. Ewing

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

STAMP: Peacefully on 29 January at the Royal Free Hospital after a short illness, Frances Bosworth, aged 89, widow of the 2nd Baron Stamp of Cheltenham, and beloved mother of Trevor and Richard, and grand-mother of Catherine, Emma, Lucinda and Nicholas. The funeral will be held at Hampstead Parish Church, Church Row, NW3 on Friday 6 February at 11.30am. No flowers please but donations if desired to The League of Friends of Cheltenham for Severely Physically Handicapped Children c/o Richard Stamp.

Announcements for BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS should be sent to: The Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 071-293 2012 or faxed to 071-293 2010. Charges are £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Duke of York, Patron, opens The Princess Louise Wing Outpatient Department of the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

Changing of the Guard

The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am; F Company Scots Guards mounts the Queen's Guard, at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am, both provided by the Coldstream Guards.

Birthdays

Mr Peter Allen, broadcaster, 52; Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Ashmore, 77; The Hon Sir Clive Bosson Bt, former MP, 80; Professor John Brown, Astronomer Royal for Scotland, 51; Mr Jim Cunningham MP, 57; Dr P.E. Thompson Hancock, specialist in cancer treatment, 64; Lord Haslam, Malouf, novelist, 64; The Hon Mrs Ray Michie MP, 64; Mr Stanley Newens MEP, 68; Sir Michael Nicholson, a Lord Justice of Appeal, Northern Ireland, 65; Dr James McIntosh Patrick, painter and etcher, 91; Mr Charles Pollard, chief constable, Thames Valley, 53; Mr William Ross MP, 62; Lord Ryder of Wensum, former MP, 49; Lord Shawcross QC, former Attorney-General and former Chancellor, Sussex University, 96; Mr John Willan, former managing director, London Philharmonic, 55; Mr Norman Wigmore, actor and comedian, 83; Sir Christopher Zeeman, former principal, Hertford College, Oxford, 73.

Anniversaries

Births: Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, playwright and novelist, 1688; Myles Birket Foster, painter, 1825; Richard D'Arby (Richard Yrard), composer, 1829; (Richard Yrard), composer, 1829; Valentine Cameron Prinsep, artist, 1838; Charles Augustus Lindbergh, aviator, 1902; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian, 1906; Ida Lupino, film actress, producer and writer, 1918; tress, producer and writer, 1918; Antonio Pollaiuolo (de Ja-dentissimo Pollaiuolo), Florentine sculptor, 1430.

1498: Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, painter, 1767; Karen Carpenter, singer, 1958; Libera (Wladimir Valentin), entertainer, 1967. On this day: The Ashanti War ended following the Battle of Kumasi, 1874; the command of the German Army was assumed by Adolf Hitler, 1938; the Yalta Conference opened, when Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin met, 1945; Ceylon (later known as Sri Lanka) became an independent state, 1948; sweet rationing ended in Britain, 1953; the *Sunday Times* issued the first colour supplement in Britain, 1962. Today is the Feast Day of St Andrew Corsini, bishop, St Isidore of Pelusium, St Joan of Valois, St John de Britto, St Joseph of Leonesse, St Modan, St Nicholas Studites, St Phileas, St Rembert and St Theophilus the Penitent.

Lectures

National Gallery: Alexander Sturges, "Van Eyck (1): the art of Jan van Eyck, 1pm; Alan Bennett, "Spill for Choice", 6.30pm.

Tate Gallery: Christine Boyanowski, "The Neo-Romantic Landscape: Francis Bacon, Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland", 1pm.

Coningsby Club

The Committee of the Coningsby Club hosted a dinner last night at the Carlton Club, London SW1. The guest of honour and speaker was Mr Peter Lilley MP, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr Martin Calderbank presided.

LAW REPORT: 4 FEBRUARY 1998

Private prosecution was not an abuse of process

The launching of a private prosecution against a young person charging him with an offence for which he had received a police caution was not an abuse of the process of the court.

H v L and another: Queen's Bench Divisional Court (Lord Justice Schiemann and Lord Justice Poole) 29 January 1998

The Divisional Court allowed the appellant's appeal by way of case stated against the decision of the Basildon Youth Court to stay a private prosecution brought by him as being an abuse of the process of the court.

The appellant's son had been assaulted by the respondents, causing him actual bodily harm. They were cautioned by the police, each having had the benefit of legal advice, and signed a form which indicated in terms that such cautions did not preclude the bringing of proceed-

ings by an aggravated party. The appellant subsequently laid informations against the respondents, alleging affray and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. The justices found that because the respondents had been cautioned by the police, the proceedings should be stayed as an abuse of the process of the court, and dismissed the informations.

Luke Blackburn (John Haynes, Southend-on-Sea) for the appellants; John Livingston (Diver Harvey & Phillips, Basildon) for the respondents.

Mr Justice Poole said that the justices had said in the case stated that they were of the opinion that cautioning provided an important alternative to prosecution in the case of a young offender where there had been an admission of guilt, and in appropriate circumstances, such as where the offender was of previous good character.

Whilst the administering of cautions to the respondents was not a bar to the institution of criminal proceedings by the appellant in relation to offences arising out of the same incident in respect of which they had been cautioned, the justices had found that it was unfair and oppressive to the respondents to allow the proceedings to continue as that would frustrate the purpose of cautioning them, and would, further, undermine the policy adopted by the local police of cautioning young offenders in appropriate circumstances.

It had been submitted on behalf of the appellant that the reasons put forward in the case stated were not ones which could have been used by the justices to make a proper finding of law. There was no potential unfairness to the respondents in the prosecution, and proceedings should be stayed as an abuse of

process only in exceptional circumstances.

Counsel for the respondents had argued that the very purpose of the cautioning procedure would be seriously and adversely affected if private prosecutions of offenders who had been cautioned were routinely permitted, and that such prosecutions should be stayed except where the prosecutor could successfully argue on the facts of the particular case that the police had acted wrongly or unreasonably in resorting to the cautioning procedure.

That argument, if accepted, would present a most significant constraint upon private prosecutions which had never been contemplated by either the courts or the legislature. The right of private prosecution was expressly preserved by section 6(1) of the Prosecution of Offenders Act 1985. It was

subject to a number of procedural limitations, and the court should not, in effect, add what would amount to a further category of restraint. Whether an offender's admission, explicit in every caution case, could be used against him in a subsequent prosecution was a matter for the court's discretion, both at common law and under section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

The reasons put forward in the case stated were not ones that could properly be used by the justices to make a proper finding of law; there was no unfairness or potential unfairness to the respondents in the proposed prosecution; and the trial process contained sufficient common law and statutory mechanisms to ensure fairness in circumstances such as the present. The appeal would be allowed.

- Kate O'Hanlon, Barrister

What Clinton can tell Blair about Murdoch, the titanic tax avoider



EDITOR: ROSIE BOYCOTT
DEPUTY EDITOR: CHRIS BLACKHURST
ADDRESS: 1 CANADA SQUARE,
CANARY WHARF,
LONDON E14 3DL
TELEPHONE: 0171 293 2000
OR 0171 345 3000
FAX: 0171 293 2435
OR 0171 345 2435

Tony Blair flies off today to consort with the President of the United States. A love feast is prepared. The two men have a lot in common, starting with wives of considerable distinction. They share something else. In both their countries a large chunk of media power is exercised by the same corporate conglomerate controlled by a single man, Rupert Murdoch. His sway in American politics is a good deal less than the influence he enjoys in this country. Not even the most imaginative paranoid can trace a pattern in the products of the Murdoch-owned Fox television and 20th Century Fox film, Bart Simpson and *Independence Day* included. But then again not even the biggest sceptic could deny Murdoch's role in bankrolling the American right: if there is, as Mrs Clinton so memorably affirmed, a right-wing conspiracy out to do her husband down, rest assured Rupert Murdoch's fingers are somewhere in the pie.

As for Britain, Murdoch is a man to

whom a Labour prime minister opens the doors of Downing Street, the potentate to whom, mysteriously, party policies on concentrations of power and competition are not to be applied. So will Messrs Blair and Clinton confer on how they perceive the power of Citizen Murdoch? Bill Clinton ought to tell him what the United States Department of the Treasury has been up to, and as a result Tony Blair might, just might, return to Britain with a gram or two more calcium in his backbone, prepared to look again at his pusillanimous and profoundly mistaken approach to the power of Murdoch.

Led by the Internal Revenue Service of the United States, tax officials from several countries recently got together to swap notes on the global reach of News Corp, the Australian-based entity Murdoch uses to rule his empire. They confront a striking question. Why does News Corp pay an effective corporation tax rate of just under 8 per cent while comparable media

entities, such as Disney, pay nearly four times as much?

Let's be clear that the problem with Murdoch is not his success or his reach. News International – the British arm of the empire – is quick to allege that rivals are merely jealous, that they are anti-enterprise. Wrong. Murdoch's acumen as a businessman has been a manipulator of the state. He is a connoisseur of regulatory regimes. He uses his property to do his politics. The News Corp story is a tale of tax havens, write-offs, accounting rules and clever balance sheet manipulation across different jurisdictions. It reports results in Australia which, if presented under US rules, would look dramatically different. Globalisation, in Murdoch terms, is the science of outsmarting national tax authorities. The man admitted to Blair's boudoir is a titanic tax avoider.

The thing to register is that the Murdoch empire is built on lack of transparency. This must be borne in mind when

he pleads innocent to charges that he is a predator in British media markets, siphoning off money here to subsidise aggression there. Exactly what are internal relationships between News International and the (part-owned) BSkyB, let alone his other telecoms and transport interests? The answer is that there are very few people inside the loop who know, let alone external competition regulators. Is Murdoch using funds from broadcasting to supply his newspaper operations in order to afford sustained price-cutting? The impact of those price cuts on the market is palpable. We at *The Independent* feel cuts in the cover price of *The Times*, and it hurts.

But the argument goes much wider than the fate of one newspaper and the resulting minimisation of pluralism in the market for news and opinion. It has two legs. One is about the effectiveness of competition rules and the regulatory bodies meant to enforce them. The Blair government's Competition Bill fails to give

the United Kingdom rules on predatory pricing anywhere near as tough as those in the United States or even Australia. If it passes in its present form, however keen Derek Morris, the chairman in waiting of the new Competition Commission, might be to investigate, his hands will be tied. With his lobbying might Murdoch seems likely to escape invigilation.

But there is a second reason why the complaisance of New Labour about Murdoch is shocking. Murdoch is an over-mighty foreigner in our midst. Any prime minister (remember those famous words of Tony Stanley Baldwin) ought to be concerned about unaccountable power, especially as it is brought to bear in the political arena. Yet Blair demurs, his henchmen exulting in their friendship with Murdoch's children and satraps. Has this prime minister no pride? Talk to Mr Clinton, Tony, and ask yourself why a predator who would not be tolerated in the United States can flourish untouched here.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor
and include a daytime telephone number.
Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk
E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address.
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

Drink-drive laws

It seems that nothing, in recent memory, has aroused such universal compliance as the nation's collective repugnance for drink-driving. Such moral high ground, and the rush to be part of it, should be regarded with some suspicion. Two pints does not make a drunk, yet getting caught is likely to brand you a "drunk-driver" for the rest of your life (report, 3 February).

Most people who stop for a drink leave after two pints. I do it, as do many of my friends. We're not drunks, fiends, or killers of children on zebra crossings, and after two pints we obey every cat's-eye. We actually drive more carefully after two pints.

Our reactions are not any slower than they are first thing in the morning, when we are in a hurry to get to work, suffering from a cold, daydreaming, angry, preoccupied, or in any of the states of mind and body we drive in, and about which there can be no legislation. Five hundred "alcohol-related" road deaths amongst tens of thousands of others. A little out of proportion, don't you think?

I'm asking for someone to speak out for the two-pints drinker, who wants to drive home without fear of being an easy target for a lazy police statistic. It's time to stop this hysterical scapegoating of people who are doing nothing wrong. JAMES HANNAWAY
Tring, Hertfordshire

A contribution towards reducing the numbers of drivers who have had too much to drink at the pub would be to ensure that soft drinks are sold at a competitive price.

Often my pint of coke is only a few pence cheaper than my husband's pint of beer. The price of a pint of beer is inflated by the taxation levied upon it – why does my soft drink cost about the same amount? MEGAN C ROBERTSON
Crews, Cheshire

Anti-culture club

Julian Lloyd Webber ("Stop the dictators of modern music", 22 February) and others who insist on performing classical works by dead and populist composers are not pro-culture, but anti-culture. For every performance of Schumann's Cello Concerto, or CD sale of Britten, there are at least 30 professional musicians, a con-

ductor and a fashionable soloist commanding figures for which most young composers could create a whole new work of art. It is a myth that very few people want to hear contemporary art music. The problem is that the people who don't want to hear it are the ones who have the most disposable income, the most free time, and the loudest voices. If there is a dictatorship of modern music, these people provide it, sustaining the 1990s "burns on seats" justification for artistic enterprise that Mr Webber espouses.

No audience, orchestra or cellist should try to influence what is felt by minds more creative and sensitive than their own and living composers should not allow their curiosity to be marginalised by mediocrity and commercialism. If it is true that only the best art survives its own lifetime, we will never discover what is best in the music of today if it is not heard. MARTIN PARKER
Penkridge, Staffordshire

There is one factor above all others which determines that atonal new classical music (no harmony, no melody, no key nor rhythm) reaches the public ear rather than new work by tonal classical composers: the almost total broadcast monopoly of new classical music possessed by Radio 3.

Imagine if there was only one publisher of new literary fiction in the entire country. That is the relation a composer has to Radio 3. In this realm, Radio 3 is an absolute totalitarian state. It is an utter anomaly in the multi-media age. KEITH BURSTEIN
London SW17

Saving the planet

I should like to counter the suggestion by Hugh Aldersey-Williams (report, 2 February) that, in setting a target of a 20 per cent cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010, the British government is guilty of harmful idealism.

It is certainly an ambitious undertaking, but attainable. However, public support for such a target may be more forthcoming if the spotlight shifts from global warming to things that more directly and immediately concern us.

For example, with 8 million households receiving some form of benefit, we can assume that a high proportion of these and the "nearly poor" are victims of fuel poverty. Cutting their fuel bills in half by raising the thermal efficiency of their homes would meet an acute social need whilst generating jobs and cutting down on the £1bn annual health bill attributable to poor housing.

The greatest energy cost in commercial buildings is the electricity bill for lighting. Using the latest lighting technology, the lighting load could be reduced, even in older buildings, at the same time improving on current illumination standards for work stations. New offices that are naturally ventilated

and lit not only save energy; they also produce more amenable working conditions. In cases where corporate headquarters have moved to new "green" premises the result has been a significant cut in absenteeism.

Setting a target date around 2005 for zero-emission city centres would propel car manufacturers into mass producing hybrid vehicles that could be electrically powered in pollution-free zones or when pollution levels are high. What about the new baby Jaguar setting the example? Cleaner air could be a very attractive by-product of the 20 per cent CO₂ cut.

Greater stress should be laid on strategies where saving the planet for future generations coincides with tackling more immediate social, health and economic problems. Professor PETER F SMITH
Chairman, Environment and Planning Committee
Royal Institute of British Architects
London W1

A mongrel language

Mrs H Marie Bell (letter, 30 January) recommends phonetic spelling reform to encourage early literacy in children. Fine! Let's write "ov" for "of", "hed" for "head" and eliminate "gh". Go beyond such timid steps, however, and you force millions worldwide to bow down to RP. Try selling that.

And once children have learned to read only the new code, try getting them to take an interest in the 600 years of English literature which will all suddenly look archaic. Or will they just scroll up a few controversially re-spelt Internet versions? While localised, ethnically pure, languages like German can promote a degree of cohesion by imposing a phonetic system favourable to the elite dialect, I'm afraid our hapless universal and mongrel language can only retain its own cohesion by, in the main, sticking to its historical morphology, to grasp which, incidentally, is an education in itself. BERNARD NOBLE
The Hague, Netherlands

Quick cash

Nigel Pascoe QC, of the Bar Council, says that the QC system recognises ability "in the same way as the appointment of a hospital consultant" ("Bar-risters attacked for price-fixing as think-tank calls for silk cut", 2 February). Not in remuneration it doesn't! The NHS pays a hospital consultant approximately £150 a day while, on your figures, a QC gets £1,350 a day from legal aid. Does QC stand for Questionable Comparisons? ANDREW A JEFFREY
Rode, Northamptonshire

You show me yours

Does Iraq have the right to inspect the West's weapons of mass destruction? PAUL O'HANLON
Runcom, Cheshire

Thanks to Europe

Phyllida Barstow (letter, 31 January) relates how crossing the Channel used to be an adventure, everything on the other side looking, smelling and tasting different.

I too vividly remember crossing the Channel, into a country in which it was impossible to get a decent meal in whole counties, because even if the ingredients were available, nobody knew what to do with them. A land where women left church early to put the cabbage on, and where the delicatessen was a newsagent's that sold milk.

If England now looks, smells and tastes not that much different from Europe, let us thank our lucky stars. NICOLAS DU Q BIRD
Bath, Somerset

Phyllida Barstow is overly dependent about the "dead hand of the European Union".

EU-based firms have responded by drawing attention to the national provenance of their products or the brand name. Audi has a sensationally effective "this car is German" message ("Vorsprung durch Technik"). VW has made a virtue of Germanic obsession with detail, and advertising has taught us that Beck's beer is made by the "brewmen of Brei", men, Germany".

Such marketing strategies have impact for the simple reason that most people in the EU still believe in the reality of national differences. Ask Nicole and her Papa. Professor DAVID HEAD
Department of Modern Languages
University of Northumbria at Newcastle

All in the mind

Your article on George Dyson (Hypewatch, 15M, 31 January) mentions a dynasty of technogurus. You might have mentioned his mother, Verena Huber-Dyson, a distinguished mathematical logician. On retirement off the coast of British Columbia, she joined the local yacht club to learn navigation. When the class was assigned exercises, the other potential yachtspersons complained that "that lady" always solved all the problems in her head. IAN HACKING
All Souls College
Oxford

The greatest story ever told – again, and this time, no one gets nailed to a cross



MILES KINGTON

It was only a matter of time before Disney decided to go for the ultimate and make an animated film based on the life of Jesus. This brave decision has been made partly because it makes sense from a Millennium marketing point of view, partly because there aren't many Old World classics left that they haven't already dealt with.

To allay fears about the Disney treatment of a Bible story, Disney executives have been giving interviews to selected members of the press, and I was lucky enough to have five minutes with Ralph J Kleinmut, who is Chief Disney Jesus Story Co-ordinator, Europe. Here they are. (The five minutes.)
Me: Doesn't it seem a strange idea to retell the Bible story, when it has already been quite well told?
Disney: Has it? By whom?
Me: In the Bible.
Disney: Oh, right! Well, in a sense, that helps our case, because there are at least four versions of the Jesus story in the Bible, done

by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. So doing different versions is not a new idea.
Me: So this will be the gospel according to Disney?
Disney: Right! Don't forget that many other people have retold the story, too. Norman Mailer, most recently, and your very own Lloyd Webber and Rice.
Me: They are not my very own.
Disney: Well, they're somebody's. Maybe ours. Yes, I think Rice is ours.
Me: In all modern Disney films, the hero has been impossibly chunky, with vacant Hollywood beefcake looks. Will this apply to Jesus too?
Disney: We are still auditioning for the part of Jesus.
Me: You have to audition for an animated part?
Disney: For the voice, yes.
Me: But how will you draw him? And will there be a love interest? And will there be a happy ending...? After all, you totally

changed the end of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*...
Disney: Wait, wait! Steady on. We're still formulating the beginning of the film. We've established Jesus as a baby in the manger...
Me: Gurgling and chuckling, like Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*? Already doing miracles in the crib? With the animals making googoo eyes over the edge of the cot? And the baby donkeys and oxen playing games, tossing the gold, myrrh and frankincense back and forth? And a few birds singing gospel songs in black voices?
Disney: Why, yes! How did you know?
Me: I have seen Disney films before, you know. How are you visualising the 12 disciples?
Disney: As of right now, we are envisaging only seven disciples. They will be called Happy, Sainly, Holy, Moly, Gooddy, Godly, and Doubtful.
Me: Doubtful?

Disney: Yes. He is based loosely on Doubting Thomas, and he will be the cute, comic one.
Me: How do you have a cute, comic disciple?
Disney: Because whenever he prays he gets the wrong answer to his prayers.
Me: Hmm. Will the disciples be dwarves?
Disney: No. That would not be dignified. But Pontius Pilate will probably be a dwarf.
Me: Why?
Disney: So that people do not feel sorry for him when he gets zapped.
Me: Pardon?
Disney: We have been rethinking the end of the New Testament story.
Me: Hold on. Do you mean that Jesus doesn't get crucified?
Disney: Disney has never been pro-violence. We are very sensitive to any accusations that children might be corrupted by on-screen violence.
Me: Do you mean that Jesus does not

actually get crucified in the end?
Disney: The whole message of the New Testament is that Jesus is alive at the end. He doesn't die in the long run. The important thing is to affirm that Jesus is living.
Me: Do you mean that Jesus doesn't get crucified?
Disney: Well, we don't say that he isn't crucified. But it all takes place a little off-screen. The point we are emphasising is that Pontius Pilate will get his comeuppance. That's what people are going to cheer for.
Me: When he gets zapped?
Disney: By a thunderbolt. Pow!
Me: And he dies?
Disney: No. He gets changed into a fish.
Me: A fish?
Disney: And gets chased by the shark.
Me: What shark?
Disney: The shark that helps Jesus walk on the water.
Me: But what...?
Aide: I'm sorry. Five minutes is up.

هكذا من الأدل

Bill or Tony: which one will history remember?



**HAMISH
McRAE**
IN SEARCH OF
THAT BIG IDEA

David Broder, the columnist on *The Washington Post*, made an interesting comparison yesterday between Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. He told *Radio 4's Today* programme that Blair had, in practice, more political power than Clinton, and might go down in the history books as more important – just as Margaret Thatcher would seem more important than Ronald Reagan.

It might seem a little startling to have a top US columnist suggest that Thatcher was more important than Reagan: the latter did after all "win" the Cold War. But if you try and tie down the personal element of the achievement and the influence projected beyond the country's national borders I think the judgement is pretty fair. The US victory over the Soviet Union was not so much a personal achievement of the President, but the cumulative effect of US economic and technical might competing against an economic system that was already falling apart. Margaret Thatcher, working out of a much weaker power-base – the demoralised strike-ridden Britain of 1979 – established a set of ideas which continue to sweep the world.

Not only was Britain the first developed country to promote the notion that governments should seek to become smaller rather than larger, the practical application of that notion became Britain's biggest post-war intellectual export. Last year, China announced the privatisation of its state industries: more than 100 million people on the other side of the world are now having the nature of their employment changed as a result of an idea developed here under Margaret Thatcher.

Now apply the same benchmark to Clinton and Blair: are they developing and promoting ideas that could conceivably sweep the world?

I don't see much that can be attributed directly to Bill Clinton. If you look at the big issues that need to be tackled in the US and see where the new ideas are coming from, they are all bottom-up. Things like the Wisconsin programme to transfer people from welfare to work or the attack on crime in New York are now attracting enormous attention elsewhere in the world (including the UK), but these have nothing to do with the President. If you were looking for a US figure whose ideas might come to have world resonance I guess you might turn to Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board: but the reality is that US influence in the world is much more a general result of economic success than a result of presidential intellect.

And Tony Blair? Well, we don't know, do we? It is quite easy to sketch how the role of government is likely to change over the next generation, how the UK happens to be in the right position to be a potential leader in that

process of change, and how Tony Blair has the authority to push it through. But will he?

The quest of Tony Blair is often presented as finding some middle way between the effective but brutal version of market capitalism in America and the faltering welfare state model of Europe. I think actually the challenge to developed-country government is more subtle and more interesting. It is how to redefine the proper role of government in a way that will both foster a more efficient economy and protect, encourage and empower the weakest citizens.

The continental European model has been to get the government to provide the service: to run an extensive (and in many ways excellent) social welfare system as well as building nuclear power stations, high-speed rail links and pouring money into banks like Credit Lyonnais. We here have been feeling our way towards a different model, one which makes the distinction between the state's responsibility to ensure adequate services and the actual provision of those services. The weapons have been privatisation and regulation: do less and regulate more.

Unsurprisingly we have made a lot of mistakes. Many services that remain largely in public hands (health and education) are not fully satisfying the customers; some services that have been passed to the private sector (eg Virgin's west coast railway line) have yet to do so. Our regulators have had to learn as they go along, and some of them have performed better than others.

What we cannot yet know is whether the Blair government (or governments if he gets back) will just refine and improve this mix of private and public provision, a "let's see what seems to work and give it a push" approach. That is what seems to be happening now: a bit more private sector initiative here, a bit more regulation there; a bit of public-sector spending on the Millennium Dome, a bit of public-sector dosh for the Channel link, a bit of private money for the tube.

There is nothing wrong with that. Indeed it may be the best way of learning how governments will have to behave over the next generation: do not have too many grand ideas; just try not to make a mess of things. But it is not going to be a Big Idea we will export to the world. We may export lots of small ideas, as does the US at the moment; but Tony Blair will reap no more credit than Bill Clinton.

There is, however, the outline of a Big Idea floating around, bits of which you can discern both from Tony Blair's speeches and from some government actions. It is that governments will redefine the frontier between what is proper for the public sector and what is proper for the private sector by changing people's perception of their own responsibilities. In other words the state will do less not by abdicating its responsibilities, but by changing people's behaviour so that it does not need to do so much.

Thus single mothers will not need to rely so much on other taxpayers to support them because they will be able to support themselves. People will not need to use the NHS so much because they are smoking less, exercising and eating healthier foods. We will get richer because we will learn to behave better. This is a concept of government which is really breathtakingly bold, a Big Idea that really would change the entire way in which governments operate in developed countries in the next century. In fact it is really the only way out of the bind in which governments find themselves, caught between higher expectations and smaller resources to fulfil those expectations. And if the message is to "behave better", Mr Blair has a significant advantage over the man in the Oval Office.

So Texas thinks this is a humane substitute for the electric chair?



**PAUL
VALLEY**
IN THE DEATH
CHAMBER

Blue is the colour of death in Huntsville, Texas. Pale blue, I know because I have been inside the chamber in which the lethal injection is administered. Indeed I have leaned against the padded metal gurney to which Karla Faye Tucker was last night due to be strapped. I looked up. Overhead was a neon light and the ceiling of powder blue. Such is the first earthly sight of the condemned prisoner. "A psychologist suggested that colour," the assistant warden told me. "It is very relaxing." It minimises the urge to struggle, apparently.

The gurney is the only piece of furniture in the death chamber in the Walls Unit of the Texas Department of Corrections prison. To the side is a window like that of the control booth in a TV studio. Karla Tucker nominated five people to watch her die from behind the thick plate glass, the maximum number of personal witnesses allowed. Three relatives of her victims also asked to be present.

But there is another room, hidden from the view of the condemned individual. It houses the equipment from which the fatal cocktail is administered by an official who cannot see the person the state has decided to kill. Three tubes feed into a single catheter which passes through the wall and to the gurney. Along it passes pavulon (a muscle relaxant), sodium thiopental (the lethal poison) and potassium chloride (which stops the heart dead). "If you don't get the balance right," the assistant governor told me, "he would kick like a horse".

It was "he" in those days. Executions are a pretty routine thing in Texas. But they were all men. Karla Faye Tucker is the first woman to be executed there since the American Civil War. "I don't like doing it, but it is a part of my job," said the man responsible for the protocol of the executions as he outlined the rules on who is allowed to visit in the Death Cell and on the convict's last shower, change of clothes and final meal. Karla Tucker, we are told, requested a banana,

peaches and a tossed salad. Very healthy.

There is a ghastly irony about so much to do with the execution process. Apart from the thick broad straps of fawn leather by the metal bed, the atmosphere in the chamber is medical. There is a strap to wrap around the condemned arm just like the one the doctor uses when you have a blood sample taken. And before the deadly needle is inserted, the arm is thoughtfully swabbed with disinfectant. The person who inserts the needle in the arm is not the same one who then activates

Before the deadly needle is inserted the arm of the condemned prisoner is thoughtfully swabbed with disinfectant

the plunger, so that responsibility is shared, just as with a firing squad some soldiers are given blanks. No doctors are involved in the act (though one is on hand to certify death) and yet there seems about the process an unnatural and rather wilful inversion of the Hippocratic Oath, much as there is in satanic parodies of Christian worship. In this atmosphere the cold courtesy of the prison officials seemed to me to be chilling.

All this was some years ago. I had gone to Huntsville not long after Texas abandoned death by electrocution for the "more humane" injection. Just down the road from the redbrick jail, I met Sam Gilstrap, who for 26 years had been the master mechanic for the electric chair

14 executions," Dr George Beto had said. "The worst was that of a black man who sang 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' as he walked from the cell to the chamber. I couldn't see him at first. I could just hear him coming along the hall. Even today that song makes my flesh creep." But Sam Gilstrap had taken part in 125 executions. At night, he said, he slept well enough.

I returned to the jail and Death Row where I had arranged to interview the next man to be executed, Carlos De Luna. He was a 24-year-old who had been convicted of stabbing to death a petrol station attendant in the town of Corpus Christi, in southern Texas, three years before. All along he main-

tained his innocence, but few people believed him.

Looking into the eyes of a man who is condemned to die it is hard to resist the temptation to make a judgement. The young Hispanic convict sat in a metal cage and peered through a slot of thick reinforced glass. For some reason throughout the interview I was seized with the compulsion that I had to decide whether I believed him. "The courts should stop playing these games. If one of us kidnapped someone and locked them up for ten years and told them every day that they were to be

is a human being speaking. Is it right to do this?"

All at once I was overcome with the certainty that he was guilty. And yet, at the same time, I knew his guilt was a matter of utter irrelevance in the face of what was about to happen. He was one of 250 men and three women on Death Row. They were not the only murderers in the jail, and indeed many of those not under sentence of death had committed crimes far more heinous. But they had lost in the legal lottery in a state where 90 per cent of cases are settled by plea bargaining in which the accused accepts a lighter sentence in return for a guilty plea. It was the poor, the simple and the inept who ended up on Death Row, the ones who couldn't afford a decent lawyer.

If only Karla Tucker had had one she might have been able to transform her case into a gender issue earlier, just as O J Simpson turned his trial into one about race and Louise Woodward's became one about whether mothers should go out to work. Had Tucker harnessed at a much earlier stage the support which has mushroomed from born-again Christians (after her conversion), anti-death penalty liberals and most latterly women's groups, it might have been a different story. But for Karla Tucker fame, it seems, came a little too late.

Good Health.

Costs less to protect than you think.

They say that a glass of red wine a day is good for you. It's relatively inexpensive and, of course, enjoyable. But it doesn't come with any firm guarantees.

Our Primecare plan, on the other hand, is a rather more reliable way to look after your health. It offers private health cover for the price of a glass of wine – from as little as 55p a day. Primecare is not only affordable, but covers you for all the things that really matter. Things like hospital costs, specialist fees, alternative treatments and physiotherapy.

And because Primecare comes with an automatic no-claims discount, you'll find the premiums easy to swallow right from the start.

To see how little Primecare can cost, call now for a personal quotation and full details.

0800 77 99 55

Prime Health
A member of the Standard Life Group

You pay less for quality health insurance.

Paddy Ashdown killed my guinea pig ...



**GLEND
COOPER**
UNWANTED
HOUSE GUESTS

Guess who's coming to dinner? If you live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne forget seeing your mother-in-law, it's more likely to be a leader of a political party. Yesterday, Paddy Ashdown's aides let it be known that the Lib Dem leader was off on a fact-finding mission spending the night with a family that knows what it's like to live on benefits.

Now everyone has heard that this government's imperative is to get as many people off benefits as possible. And presumably this is their latest secret weapon in welfare-to-

work: get off the dole or we're sending Paddy round to stay. (Certainly it's likely to have a greater effect than any Job Seekers Allowance or childcare scheme.)

The organiser of the visit, a Liberal Democrat councillor, said Paddy's hosts wished to remain anonymous to avoid the pressure of the media glare. That means that we can only imagine what could possibly happen when a brave politician goes to seek "real views from real people".

It's 00:00 hours (or 5.35pm to you or me) and three masked men in camouflage gear and a dog knock down the front door of the council house belonging to George, Julie and their children Jack and Susan. Flat against the wall, the men swarm into the living room and tie the flabbergasted family to the dining room chairs. Then one pulls off his mask. "At ease, down. Great to meet some real people instead of hanging out with the Young Lib Dems. Let's discuss Labour's planned shake-up of the benefits system." His faithful mongrel, Luke, gives Jack a lick as Paddy gets out his Geordie translation book.

But it's a bad time to

choose. The kids seem to be concentrating on a soap opera called *Neighbours* (which Paddy notes doesn't seem to quite fit the party's stance on finding local solutions to local problems) and Julie is concerned about starting tea.

"Don't worry – let's forage!" shouts Paddy. "We had to in Borneo you know!" He returns a few minutes later with a small furry animal which he kills with his bare hands. "I've eaten rats before – we had hard times in the Marines," he says. Young Susan starts to cry: "You've killed Bubbles the guinea pig, you horrible, horrible man. Booohooohoo." Paddy looks apologetic. "Oh damn, not again. Difficult to tell in the dark. I'm so sorry," he says. There is a ferocious knocking at the door. He springs up again. "A riot! We get a awful lot of those in Yeovil too you know. I once fought off a knife-wielding attacker with an old Special Boat Service trick." He opens the door suddenly and pounces on the intruder. Unfortunately, the little old lady he jumps on gives him a stunning left hook and fells him. "Get your filthy hands off me, young man. I'm not that kind of girl," she squawks. "Julie, those local lads are caus-

ing trouble again. Three of them dressed up playing silly buggers have uprooted my best apple tree and fence."

"I think that was Mr Ashdown, Ma'am," says Julie. "I think they were using the twigs as disguises. It's something politicians do."

"Er yes," says another of the camouflage men. "Sorry about that. We didn't know what else to use. Have a Young Lib Dem spliff in compensation."

"Don't mind if I do," says the good lady, accidentally kicking Paddy quite viciously on the shin as she sits down. "Paddy Ashdown did you say? Isn't your real name Paddy Pantisdown? Didn't I hear ..."

"Great, the whole family is finally together," breaks in Paddy. "Now we can really discuss what you think of the welfare state."

There is a stunned silence. "Well I think it's a good idea," ventures George.

"I don't think lone parent benefit should be cut," adds Julie.

"Can we watch *East-Enders*?" choruses Jack and Susan.

"But do you think that Labour is backtracking on their election pledges? What do you think of the Tories opposing a

£65m benefit cut that they had proposed in government? What do you think of the Lib Dem proposals?" adds Paddy.

"It's time for tea," says Julie with relief.

Throughout the meal Paddy cross-examines each member of the family for half an hour about their knowledge of the childcare disregard, pensioners' one-off winter payments and disability living allowance. Adding up the marks at the end, Susan and Jackie, with Susan winning the tie break for knowing Harriet Harman's middle name. She's given a Lib Dem "Make a Difference" election poster as a prize. At 8.20pm Paddy pronounces it time for bed.

"But we haven't seen the end of *EastEnders* yet," sulks Jack, still miffed over Harman. Paddy looks surprised. "But we're getting up at 6.15am to read through the papers. My overnight team will have provided a brief on the media. Then we're going jogging and a few physical jerks – mens sana in corpore sano."

"I've hurt my ankle," says Julie.

"Oh don't worry. It's something I've adapted from the All Work test to see if you're eligible for disability benefit. Most

GUS stuns City by launching hostile £1.6bn bid for Argos

Great Universal Stores surprised the stock market yesterday with a £1.6bn hostile bid for Argos, the catalogue retailer. Argos rejected the bid as 'opportunistic' and must fight the takeover without its chief executive who is seriously ill. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent reports.

GUS turned hostile after failing to agree terms with the Argos management during two meetings in the past week. GUS pitched its cash offer at 570p but the Argos share price soared 42 per cent to 630p, indicating that the City regards it as only an opening shot. GUS shares closed 29p higher at 762p.

"At the right price it is an attractive deal but it would not look so good much over 630p," said Nick Bubb at SG Securities. Argos rejected the offer and advised its shareholders to reject the offer. Argos also announced that its chief executive, Mike Smith, is unable to undertake his full range of duties and is undergoing a course of medical treatment. The company has decided to search for a new chief executive designate. "To describe it [the bid] as opportunistic in view of all the circumstances would be an understatement," it said.

Analysts were sceptical that a counter-bidder would emerge. Some suggested Kingfisher but it would run into regulatory difficulties as its Woolworths chain has a high market share in toys in which Argos is also strong.

It is GUS's first ever hostile bid in its 80-year history and will be funded by around £1bn debt, the first time the company has owed a penny since the 1950s. Lord Wolfson, GUS chairman, first approached Argos nine months ago about a possible link in home shopping. It held bid talks with Sir Richard Lloyd, the Argos chairman, twice in the last week but they broke down on price. "Our impression was that they agreed there was a certain logic to the deal but there was a big gap on price," Lord Wolfson said.

GUS said its offer represented a 40 per cent premium to the closing Argos price on 27 January and so was "full and fair". Lord Wolfson said the logic of the deal was not to cut costs or clear out the Argos management, most of whom would be retained. He said the deal would give GUS a high street presence with 433 stores, which could be used to build a valuable database on customer shopping habits.

A deal would enable GUS to offer Argos products through its own catalogues, which include Kay's and Choice, and to include GUS ranges in the Argos product selection. GUS also said it would be able to help Argos build a home shopping and home delivery operation at a fraction of the cost of the programme planned by Argos. It said it would be able to offer call centres, and a delivery infrastructure using its White Arrow van network, which handles 110 million parcels a year. GUS would also be able to offer credit to customers using its Experian finance operation.

Lord Wolfson said Argos had been facing considerable pressure as rivals grabbed mar-

ket share in its core markets of toys, electricals and jewellery. A good home shopping operation would also help alleviate Argos' problems with long queues at Christmas, he said.

He said he did not expect the deal to run into problems with the regulatory authorities as there were no market share problems.

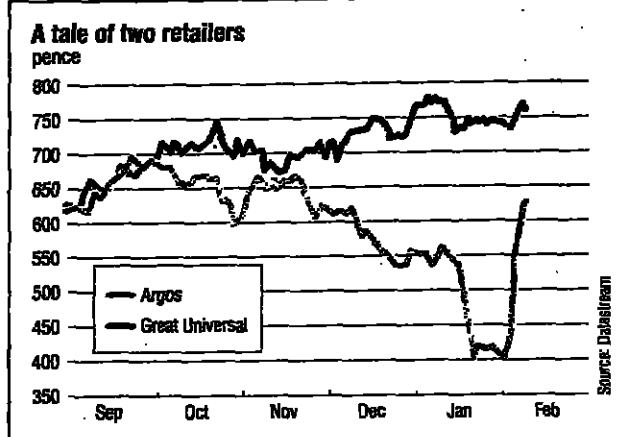
The offer is a huge blow to Argos, which was one of the stock market's star performers in 1995 and early 1996 but has since fallen from grace. "It is inescapable that Argos has run out of steam," said Richard Hyman of Verdict Research. "But it is a good business and is not dead and buried." He said among its problems were a mature market, price competition from rivals, and few exclusive products that could not be bought elsewhere. He said some consumers might have deserted the stores for shops with slightly better service and a superior store environment.

It has been seeking new routes to customers and planned to roll out a national home shopping operation next year. The deal would mark a return to the high street for GUS, which in the 1960s had more than 2,000 stores. It represents a further step in the revitalisation of GUS under Lord Wolfson, who became chairman in autumn 1996. During his tenure the once sleepy group has already paid £1bn for Experian, an American credit scoring and database company.

It is thought GUS might demerge the Burberry operation, which has 60 UK stores, at some stage. Lord Wolfson admitted yesterday a demerger might be possible in three to five years. Outlook, page 21



Cash call: GUS claims it could slash the cost of developing Argos' home shopping operation Photograph: Andrew Buurman



ARGOS

- The company is 25 years old and the first 17 stores opened in 1973
- Bought by BAT Industries in 1979 and floated on the stock market in 1990
- It has 430 stores in the UK and Ireland
- It employs an average of 85,000 people
- In 1996 it made a pre-tax profit of £44m on sales of £1.7bn
- It is the leading catalogue chain store and is third in the world
- Seven out of ten households have a copy of an Argos catalogue
- It had a stock market value of £1.22bn as at close of trading on Monday

GUS

- Known as GUS, founded in 1927
- It had a stock market value of £1.37bn as at close of trading on Monday
- It achieved 48 consecutive years of profits growth until 1997, when profits fell to £50m on £2.7bn turnover
- Until recently the company was known for a conservative policy of organic growth
- It employs about 25,000 people
- Its main divisions are home shopping, bookshops, departmental stores, and departmental stores and property

Increased £4bn offer may spark Energy bid battle

A bidding war for Energy Group, owner of Eastern Electricity, was in prospect last night after PacificCorp launched an increased £4.06bn bid for the company.

The offer valued the group at 765p a share - 13 per cent above PacificCorp's first offer last year. But yesterday shares in Energy Group soared 21p to 775.5p as analysts predicted rival predators would join the bidding, forcing the US utility to improve on its offer.

PacificCorp made a £3.6bn takeover bid last June, but the offer lapsed after the deal was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Since the MMC cleared the link-up, two other potential bidders have emerged in the shape of Texas Utilities, another US power group, and Nomura, the Japanese investment bank.

Fred Buckman, PacificCorp chief executive, admitted there was a possibility that the rival bidders would make a higher offer, but said Texas did not have a history of "bidding beyond their means".

"I'm prepared for the fact that others might step in... We've offered pretty good value and on terms that the others will find it hard to compete with."

PacificCorp also implied that the other suitors still in discussions with Energy Group could face MMC investigations. "Regulatory clearance was specific to PacificCorp. I'm putting forward a bid which is not going to be referred," said Mr Buckman, adding that PacificCorp had agreed to sell two Energy Group coal mines in Arizona to satisfy the US regulator, the Federal Trade Commission.

Both Nomura and Texas face opposition from Labour MPs concerned about Eastern's financial security. Privately PacificCorp believes Texas's nuclear power liabilities, along with Nomura's reputation for complex financial deals, make it likely both bids would be referred to the MMC.

Mr Buckman denied that PacificCorp would resort to junk bonds to fund the deal. Around £1.8bn (£1.1bn) of the new offer would be funded from PacificCorp's cash reserves, more than in the previous bid, with the remaining £4.8bn through debt. But it would still leave PacificCorp with a £15bn (£9.4bn) debt mountain.

Meanwhile, Energy Group yesterday revealed quarterly operating profits of £314m between October and December, up from £221m the year before. - Chris Goddard, Outlook, page 21

Treasury nets £100m as taxpayers miss January deadline

The Government yesterday admitted that nearly a million taxpayers had failed to send in self-assessment tax returns on time for last Saturday's deadline, netting the Treasury up to £100m in fines. But ministers made a surprise concession to those who made innocent mistakes by offering a week's extension to some.

Dawn Primarolo, the financial secretary to the Treasury, set a new deadline for taxpayers who make mistakes. Taxpayers will now have until the 11 February to correct and return the forms.

An estimated 400,000 taxpayers - just under 5 per cent - made oversights in filling in their tax returns and had them sent back. Many faced a £100 penalty for missing the deadline because of unwitting errors.

"In this first year of self-assessment, I am prepared to be flexible. Where forms which were already returned to taxpayers are corrected and sent back by 11 February, they will be regarded as having met the deadline," Ms Primarolo said.

Final figures show that 810,000 taxpayers missed the deadline altogether, plus 70,000 partnerships and 20,000 trusts. Those who missed will be fined £100 each unless the tax liability is less than £100.

The taxpayers who missed the deadline will not only face a fine. They will also receive estimated bills from the Revenue - usually higher than their own estimates. A surcharge of 5 per cent will apply to tax outstanding by the end of February.

Accountants yesterday attacked the Treasury for being far too harsh - given its own record of mistakes.

These included a failure to publish essential software, needed to process forms, before October. Accountants normally start work on tax returns at least nine months before deadline.

Nigel Eastway, of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, said: "The concession is welcome but it doesn't go far enough. We think it's a bit harsh when a lot of people have been burning the midnight oil to get the forms done. It would have been appropriate as a gesture for the Revenue to have adopted a lighter touch." Only those who have what the Revenue thinks is a "reasonable excuse" will be let off. Excuses such as "the tax return was too difficult" or "My accountant was slow" are not thought reasonable. Reasonable excuses include a flood in the Post Office, theft of tax records or the death of a close relative. - Andrew Verity

Fresh jobless estimate will provide a truer picture

Official unemployment figures will in future give a truer picture of how many people cannot find work. The Government's statistics office is to downplay the discredited figures for the number of benefit claimants in favour of a measure in line with international standards. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, reports.

Starting in April, the headline jobless total will appear to jump by some 500,000 to about 1.9 million as the result of a decision

by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to emphasise an alternative measure of unemployment conforming to international standards, and downplay the current total.

The decision - first reported in *The Independent* last October but delayed by last-ditch resistance within Whitehall - does not go as far as some critics would like. The ONS is to base a monthly estimate of the number of people seeking jobs and available to work on the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Like the critics of the many "fiddles" which helped reduce the headline claimant count over the years, the ONS would have preferred to switch to a full monthly survey of the jobs

market. But the cost of at least £10m a year was prohibitive. The compromise will cost about £250,000 a year.

Tim Holt, director of the ONS, said: "There has been a lack of confidence in the labour market figures and this has affected public confidence in statistics at large."

He added he expected the Government would soon be holding consultation on its commitment to create an independent statistical service.

The ONS will continue to publish the number of claimants, as this is readily available from benefit offices.

John Philpott, director of the Employment Policy Institute, an independent think-tank, said:

"This is a step in the right direction."

But he added that even the new, internationally comparable measure left out some unemployed people such as lone parents who might not be actively looking for work but whom the Government was keen to get into jobs.

The two measures - the claimant count and the existing quarterly LFS unemployment total - have tended to move in the same direction. Both have fallen rapidly in the past two years and the gap is now as wide as it has ever been.

However, at least 10 changes to benefit rules since 1979 have all helped to reduce the number of claimants by far more

than what most economists would take as a "true" measure of unemployment.

As a result, the headline jobless total became one of the most discredited and politicised of all official statistics. It was criticised by the Royal Statistical Society, the House of Commons Employment Committee and even the former head of the Office for National Statistics, Bill Maclean.

In future, the ONS will present a more detailed monthly picture of the jobs market, such as an analysis of full and part-time employment, temporary and permanent jobs, and reasons for "economic inactivity", such as being in full-time education.

Eurorail poised to retender for Channel Tunnel rail link

Eurorail, the consortium which lost out in the bidding to build the 68-mile link in 1996 after it asked the Government for £500m more in subsidies than the winning bidder, London & Continental Railways.

The five partners in Eurorail - Kvaerner Construction, Balfour Beatty, HSBC Holdings, NatWest and Seaboard, are expected to meet in the next two days and confirm their interest in submitting a fresh bid by the end of the week.

Meanwhile, Railtrack is due to decide formally whether to submit a rival bid to rescue the troubled project at a board meeting a week tomorrow.

Eurorail lost the competition to build the 68-mile link in 1996 after it asked the Government for £500m more in subsidies than the winning bidder, London & Continental Railways.

LCR last week told the Government that it could not proceed with the project because revenues from the Eurostar service - a vital part of its financing plans - were £2.5bn below its original forecasts. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, rejected its application for a further £1.2bn in subsidies. Eurorail originally asked for £1.7bn in taxpayers' support.

However, its revenue forecasts for Eurostar were much more conservative than those of LCR.

Eurorail planned to finance the project with debt in its early stages, only going to the stock market to raise equity finance much later in the construction phase.

Industry observers say Eurorail is concerned that Railtrack may be allowed to walk in and take over the project by default, when European procurement rules dictate that there should be an open contest.

Eurorail also has more experience of the CTRL than

any other group, having been involved in the project since 1988, when it was originally conceived as a joint venture.

The consortium contacted the Government last November, asking to be kept informed of developments after LCR began running into financing difficulties.

Railtrack confirmed that one option being studied was to build the link in phases so that the high-speed line would initially end at Ebbsfleet in north Kent and then continue to Waterloo International. This would cut £500m from costs. - Michael Harrison

City bears brunt of UBS cuts

Staff at UBS, the Swiss bank, will bear the brunt of job cuts resulting from the merger with SBC, it was confirmed yesterday.

The redundancies will be "particularly extensive" at UBS offices in London because of the need to "keep the successful Warburg Dillon Read (owned by SBC) teams in place", according to Mathis Caballavetta, UBS's chief executive.

The two Swiss banks are expected to cut 3,000 London jobs, about half their combined City workforce. Details of redundancies will be announced within weeks.

Speaking at an emergency general meeting of UBS shareholders, who yesterday formally approved the SBC deal, Mr Caballavetta said: "Warburg Dillon Read, the highly regarded and successful investment bank, gives SBC a competitive edge in London's financial market place. It would be a mistake not to leverage this franchise for maximum advantage... This naturally implies a considerable shedding of jobs at UBS."

SBC shareholders will today vote on the deal in a separate extraordinary general meeting. - Lea Patterson

STOCK MARKETS

Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	5812.80	13.80	0.25	5616.10	4189.10	3.21
FTSE 250	4915.90	37.50	0.77	4983.80	4384.20	3.25
FTSE 350	2668.40	9.00	0.34	2685.80	2075.70	3.21
FTSE All Share	2597.58	6.52	0.25	2594.67	2058.07	3.20
FTSE SmallCap	2388.60	3.90	0.16	2407.40	2152.10	3.05
FTSE 100 Div	1289.20	0.70	0.05	1346.50	1225.20	3.12
FTSE 100 Div Yr	951.20	6.10	0.63	1138.00	985.90	1.24
FTSE AIM	8067.86	-19.92	-0.25	8299.03	6336.78	1.70
Dow Jones	7022.98	248.18	3.55	7091.07	1448.21	0.90
Nikkei	10525.51	-53.09	-0.50	10620.31	7908.13	3.80
Hong Kong	4592.52	9.71	0.22	4597.39	3032.34	3.77

INTEREST RATES

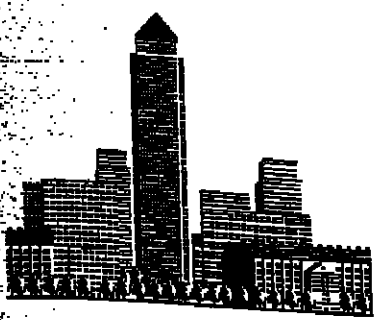
Short sterling	UK 10 year gilt	US long bond
3 month 1 yr 5 yr 10 yr	1 yr 5 yr 10 yr	1 yr 5 yr 10 yr
5.75 5.75 5.75 5.75	5.75 5.75 5.75 5.75	5.75 5.75 5.75 5.75

CURRENCIES

\$/£	DM/£	¥/£
1.6487 -0.53c	1.6230 -0.08c	160.88 -0.19c
2.9496 -1.77c	2.6734 -0.17c	1.6421 -0.01c
207.49 -22.09	194.07 -0.75	125.96 -0.75
104.20 -0.60	55.30 -0.40	102.20 -0.40

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.374	Italy (lira)	2.579
Austria (schillings)	20.38	Japan (yen)	204.86
Belgium (francs)	59.83	Malta (lira)	0.6298
Canada (\$)	2.332	Netherlands (guilders)	3.2683
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8490	Norway (kroner)	12.08
Denmark (kroner)	11.2	Portugal (escudos)	294.70
Finland (markka)	8.8500	Spain (pesetas)	246.58
France (francs)	9.7280	South Africa (rand)	7.7650
Germany (marks)	2.9107	Sweden (kronor)	12.94
Greece (drachmas)	460.56	Switzerland (francs)	2.6650
Hong Kong (\$)	12.34	Turkey (lira)	347.668
Ireland (punts)	1.1525	USA (\$)	1.6062



OUTLOOK

ON THE £1.6BN BID FOR ARGOS, THE PROPOSED GLAXO-SMITHKLINE MERGER AND THE NEW OFFER FOR ENERGY GROUP

The spirit of Sir Isaac Wolfson seems to have been reborn in his nephew David, judging by the whirlwind of activity to have swept Great Universal Stores since he took the reins a year and a half ago. On top of a series of inspired acquisitions in data processing now comes an opportunistic £1.6bn bid for Argos.

GUS has struck just when Argos is at its most vulnerable. Its chief executive is incapacitated with a life-threatening disease and its share price has been hammered by a series of profit warnings. Its once successful formula of catalogue retailing has matured and Argos is under fierce competitive pressure in all three of its main product lines - in toys from Woolies, in jewellery from a revitalised Signet, and in electrical goods from Dixons.

Furthermore, its expansion into home shopping, though clearly the right long-term strategy, is going to take both time and money - and lots of them. Here, then in the present Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale is a touch of his uncle Sir Isaac's legendary ruthlessness. Hit them when they are down and hit them hard.

But there is also some of the old pirate's business vision too. GUS already has the home shopping infrastructure Argos wants to build. All Lord Wolfson needs to do is to take the Argos brand and feed it through his own systems - no need for the expensive duplication of warehousing, call centres and distribution that Argos is intent on building. Even Argos is hard pressed to disagree with the business logic of what's proposed.

The difficulty comes on price. GUS's

570p a share is 16.5 times forecast earnings for this year. There are eight British retailers trading on higher multiples than this, so even accepting that Argos is in something of a bind, that's not much of a bid premium.

All the same, the stock market may have overreacted by driving up the price to 630p. In the absence of a rival bid from, say, Kingfisher or one of the big Continental mail order companies, it seems unlikely GUS would be prepared to go so high or that Argos could justify such a valuation on its own. Lord Wolfson doesn't need to buy Argos, and he's stubborn enough to walk away from it.

Is this merger good for Britain?

One irony for regulators in dealing with the proposed merger of Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKline Beecham is that they've been here once before. Beecham made a hostile takeover bid for Glaxo in the early 1970s when both companies were minnows compared to what they are today. That deal was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which eventually ruled it to be against the public interest on the grounds that having two research and development facilities was better for jobs and scientific advancement than just one.

Supporters of the present wave of merger mania argue that the world has greatly changed since then. For a start, both companies are now global in their reach

and organisation, as is the market for pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, the cost of new drug discovery and development is now so vast that only the biggest can hope to do it successfully across a range of different products. In other words, the case for the defence goes, this merger would be positively good for Britain, even though it will mean job losses among scientists and one R&D facility instead of two, because it would create a national champion in a pretty much unassailable position compared to competitors in terms of drug discovery.

Arguments like this are much better accepted by regulators, both in London and Brussels, than they were. Even so, policy-makers should be careful not to become too beholden to the process of globalisation. Before the merger of Glaxo and Wellcome, Britain had no less than four pharmaceutical companies up there among the world leaders. After this latest merger, we will be down to just one behemoth, an also-ran in the shape of Zeneca (which Sir Richard Sykes would also acquire, given the chance), and a smattering of biotech.

The effect of this will be to concentrate a very large proportion of Britain's private sector R&D expenditure in the hands of just one company. Regardless of the supposed need for scale in successful modern-day pharmaceuticals research, this cannot be an entirely healthy development. To believe otherwise requires the usual rules of innovation to be suspended, for the greatest chance of new product development normally lies in diversity and competition, not hegemony.

Who knows, perhaps pharmaceuticals are different, but don't count on it. Pressure for consolidation, not just in pharmaceuticals but in other industries too, comes primarily from investors keen to see margins protected and enhanced in an ever more competitive world. Any management that resists this pressure or falls behind in the race to consolidate, will rapidly find itself out the door.

Plainly the process of consolidation is in the interests of shareholders, for it enables management to counter the persistent downward pressure on prices with growing scale and market clout. Whether it is in the public interest is another matter. Unfortunately, the flood may now be too strong for politicians and regulators to turn, even if they thought there was a case for doing so.

PacifiCorp offer should do the trick

The boys from Portland, Oregon are back and this time they are more serious. But are they serious enough? PacifiCorp's 765p offer for Energy Group has been taken as a sighting shot rather than a knockout blow, which is why the market price remains comfortably above the revised offer terms and why Energy Group is keeping the door open to rival offers.

As a means of flushing out Texas Utilities and Nomura, however, PacifiCorp's increased bid ought to do the trick. In the

event of a three-way auction, Energy Group could go for something north of 800p, valuing the business at nearly £4.3bn - a 43 per cent premium to its net value before PacifiCorp popped its head out of the Oregon woods eight months ago. Who said the Americans' appetite for British regional electricity companies was on the wane?

Actually it is rather hard to see how Energy Group's prospects have improved materially since PacifiCorp's first tilt at 695p was put on ice by Margaret Beckett and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. If anything, Peabody looks even more of a bombed-out US coal business while the regulatory climate for UK Racs is scarcely any less hostile. There is one thing that's changed, however, and that's the direction of long-term interest rates. When, like PacifiCorp, three quarters of the funding is in the form of debt, these things are important.

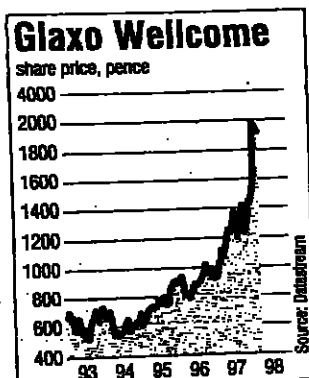
At this stage in the game, PacifiCorp also has the priceless advantage of MMC clearance. Just because it is another US utility, Texas cannot assume a bid would escape scrutiny, given its attitude to labour relations, its management record running a nuclear business and the effect of a highly-gearred bid on its balance sheet.

Guy Hands at Nomura will also have to earn every penny of his reputed £40m salary if he is to construct a deal which stacks up financially for the Japanese. Unlike his previous sorties into pubs and train leasing, regulators would not allow him get away with mortgaging off Eastern's revenue stream.

Union challenges drug giants as City voices concerns on merger

Large institutional shareholders in Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKline Beecham yesterday raised concerns about the huge payouts and salaries that could be awarded to the directors of both companies if their blockbuster merger goes through. As Andrew Yates and Barrie Clement report, the biggest deal in corporate history could also face a legal threat from union officials concerned about mass redundancies.

One fund manager said: "The directors already stand to make a lot of money and we would be concerned if they also forced



through a large rise in salaries following the deal."

The executive directors could net almost £35m between them and Glaxo directors could receive a huge pay rise as they earn significantly less than their SmithKline counterparts.

While most fund managers welcomed the merger and recognised it would have buoyed up the companies' share prices in the short term, some questioned the long-term prospects

for the combined group.

One institutional shareholder said: "This looks more like a defensive move. Research and development costs are rising all the time. With both companies looking over the precipice this move will underpin earnings for the next few years... but after that the outlook is negative."

Another fund manager said: "Margins could be whittled away by competition and any cost savings may have to be reinvested in the business."

These concerns prompted several large institutions to sell shares yesterday, pushing Glaxo's price down 56p to 1,927p, and SmithKline's price was down 14.5p to 830.5p.

Meanwhile, MSF, the science trade union, claimed workers' rights had been ignored and argued the companies were in breach of European law on employee consultation.

Roger Lyons, general secre-

tary of MSF, said management had a "clear and demonstrable" obligation to talk to union officials about the employment implications of the merger. Mr Lyons estimated that up to 10,000 jobs might be at risk because of the "overlap" between the two companies.

His protests prompted a letter from the head of the City's Panel on Takeovers and Mergers in support of its contention. In a letter to MSF, Alistair Defriez, director-general of the panel, confirmed that voluntary codes on secrecy did not override European laws insisting on consultation, provided the talks were held in secret. The MSF leader pointed out that quoted companies had often cited City rules when withholding information and argued the letter therefore constituted a "watershed" in employee relations.

The MSF general secretary has also written to Margaret Beckett, President of the Board

of Trade, expressing his concern over the potential loss of key scientific expertise. He estimated that the companies accounted for around a fifth of the jobs in research and development in the private sector in Britain.

Mr Lyons said his union did not oppose the merger, but "the case for it has not been made". On the issue of consultation Mr Lyons said employees had been treated like "serfs" and that it was time the rights enjoyed by people as citizens were extended to the workplace.

A Glaxo spokesman said all figures for potential redundancies were "pure speculation". Detailed work had to be completed before it was finally decided to press ahead with the merger.

The spokesman said his company had a policy of "open and comprehensive" communications with employees and that information would be made available as soon as possible.

Outlook, this page

Biggest test yet for a scientist who became a boardroom star

Masterminding the biggest merger ever, to produce the third biggest company in the world, would not only excite Sir Richard Sykes, chairman of drugs giant Glaxo Wellcome. It would assure his place in corporate history.

Sir Richard describes Glaxo's £9.4bn hostile takeover of Wellcome in March 1995 as the most thrilling period of his life. The £11.7bn merger of his group with SmithKline Beecham would put that in the shade.

Few would have written this script when he joined Glaxo as deputy chief executive of the research division in 1986. He was known merely as a scientist while the corporate path to the top appeared blocked by a host of charismatic figures.

But by March 1993 potential competitors such as Bernard Taylor and Ernie Mario had fallen by the wayside and Sir Richard was - to the surprise of City observers at the time - installed as deputy chairman and chief executive of Glaxo plc.

Knighted in 1994, he became chairman of the combined Glaxo Wellcome group in May last year. But he remains a down to earth family man, his Yorkshire accent linking him still to his birthplace, a village outside Huddersfield.

It is classic rags to riches tale. The youngest of three sons, his father was a carpenter and his mother worked a smallholding. He now has two children of his own and a home in Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire.

He is now a member of the

Royal Society, but was no run-away success at the local grammar school, leaving at 16 to work at the pathology laboratories of Huddersfield Royal Infirmary.

Practical work fired him up. After studying at night school he went on to win a first class degree in microbiology at London University before obtaining a doctorate in microbial biochemistry at Bristol.

His enthusiasm for matching scientific research with business came after his nine years at the Squibb Institute for Medical Research in the US. "I loved America, it's my kind of place. Lots of energy, drive and enthusiasm," he once said.

As deputy chairman and chief executive of Glaxo, Sir Richard proved he could mix the gravitas of a scientist with the acumen of a businessman. Glaxo needed it. The City was worried that management was becoming complacent after discovering sudden success with Zantac, the anti-ulcer pill that became the world's best selling drug.

Zantac had provided 43 per cent of Glaxo's turnover and put a second division company into the giants' league. But the US patent ran out in 1997 and few patent in the Glaxo hierarchy seemed aware of the pending problems.

Sir Richard grasped the nettle immediately. His comeback strategy was to launch the audacious bid for an undervalued Wellcome and set about cutting costs with a zeal that astonished some of his former associates.



Optimist: Analysts believe Sir Richard Sykes' confidence is well founded

Secondly, he pushed the Glaxo Wellcome research arm hard for new products and by the first half of 1997 had seen sales of those drugs launched since 1990 rise by 50 per cent.

Despite an expected 1997 profits slowdown, the Glaxo share price rose as analysts remain convinced that Sir Richard's continuing optimism about the future is well founded. The proposed SmithKline deal has sent stocks racing.

It all looked so effortless, with the potential deal triggered by Sir Richard picking up the phone to SmithKline's chief executive, Jan Leschly. The two have known each other since their days at Squibb Corporation but they have things in common outside business as

well. Mr Leschly is a former Davis Cup tennis player but the Glaxo boss is also a keen-fit fan who is pretty nifty with a racquet.

James Culverwell, pharmaceutical analyst with Merrill Lynch, confirms that Sir Richard will greatly add to his reputation if the latest deal goes through: "The timing of both Wellcome and SmithKline mergers has been excellent."

Robin Gilbert of Panmure Gordon has little but praise for the Glaxo boss: "Scientists turned top industrialists are pretty rare. Sir Richard has been an outstanding success. He is a balanced individual who knows his own mind."

Not everyone sings his praises. One City figure said: "He is well

regarded but he can be abrasive, impatient and opinionated."

The departure last year of Sean Lance, originally brought in as chairman-designate, was seen by some as an example that Sir Richard, like his predecessor Sir Paul Girolami, might not be the easiest person to work with.

Critics also point to the ulcer drug, Tritec, and the anaesthesia relief, Ultiva, as examples of the Glaxo chairman trumpeting products that failed to fly commercially.

Such comments are unlikely to worry Sir Richard. He once said: "I cannot run a company on the basis of what people think about me. I have to run it on the basis of what I believe is right for it in the long-term."

- Terry Macalister

BSkyB issues writ in row over Premier League TV rights

The simmering disagreement between BSkyB and Carlton over the rights to show Premier League football turned into a slanging match yesterday as BSkyB served a writ on Carlton demanding that Michael Green's media group cough up its share of a £60m payment owed to BSkyB. Peter Thal Larsen reports.

Carlton refused to back down, arguing that it would not pay until it was sure that British Digital Broadcasting (BDB), its multi-channel joint venture with Granada, would be able to show live Premier League matches when it launches in the autumn.

A Carlton spokesman said: "We are entirely right not to pay BSkyB in full until they have secured Premier League rights for digital terrestrial television. The Premier League are ready, willing and able to negotiate but Sky has dragged its feet."

The argument stems from last year, when regulators forced BSkyB to pull out of the BDB consortium on the grounds that

its involvement was anti-competitive. In compensation, Carlton and Granada agreed to pay BSkyB £75m, while the satellite broadcaster said it would still supply its channels to BDB.

However, Granada and Carlton subsequently refused to pay all but £15m of the agreed sum until BSkyB got the go-ahead from the Premier League to extend its rights to live football to include BDB. Although BSkyB is understood to have offered about £3m a year for the rights, this was rejected. The Premier League is believed to want £15m a year. BSkyB has yet to make another offer.

Granada has since paid its share of the £60m, thereby avoiding an embarrassing conflict of interest for Gerry Robinson, who is chairman of both BSkyB and Granada. But Carlton is holding out.

Yesterday Mark Booth, BSkyB's chief executive, hit out at Carlton's stand. "Obviously it's not the best way to establish a relationship but if they want a fight they can have one," he said, adding: "I can't foresee a scenario that Carlton don't pay. I think they will come to their senses."

Industry experts said that, while BSkyB was on firm

ground legally, a refusal to supply BDB with live football could attract the attention of the regulators. "It would be a clear abuse of their monopoly power," said one.

His comments came as BSkyB reported a 4 per cent drop in pre-tax profits to £128.6m in the six months to 31 December. The company ascribed the drop to slower growth in its subscriber base - the number of paying subscribers increased by 349,000 to 6.721m in the period - and the high cost of preparing for the launch of its 200-channel digital satellite service. Earnings per share dropped from 7.1p to 6.8p, while the interim dividend was maintained at 2.75p.

Meanwhile, Pace Micro Technology and Amstrad, two of the four companies which are supplying digital set-top box decoders for BSkyB, both confirmed that they would be ready to supply the decoders in time for the June launch.

Mr Booth confirmed that the digital service would be launched in June, but admitted that the "meaningful" launch would not take place until the run-up to Christmas. BSkyB shares closed up 19p at 361p.

Investment column, page 22

This advertisement is issued in compliance with the requirements of the London Stock Exchange Limited (the "London Stock Exchange"). It does not constitute an offer or form part of any offer or invitation to any person to subscribe for or purchase any securities in Close Brothers AIM VCT PLC ("the Company"). Application has been made to the London Stock Exchange for the Shares, issued and to be issued fully paid to the Offer, to be admitted to the Official List. It is expected that such admission will become effective and that dealings will commence by not later than 17 March 1998 in respect of applications for the 1997/98 tax year received on or before 16 March 1998 and by 9 April 1998 in respect of applications for the 1998/99 tax year received on or before 2 April 1998.

Close Brothers AIM VCT PLC

(Incorporated and Registered in England and Wales No 3477519)

Offers for Subscription

of up to 10,000,000 Shares
of 50p each at 100p per Share in respect of the 1997/98 tax year
and
of up to 3,000,000 Shares
of 50p each at 100p per Share in respect of the 1998/99 tax year
payable in full on application

Subject to an overall maximum subscription in respect of both Offers of 10,000,000 Shares

Sponsored by

Brewin Dolphin Bell Lawrie Limited

Share Capital immediately following the Offers, assuming that the overall maximum subscription is achieved:			
Number of Shares	Authorised	Nominal Value	Issued and to be issued fully paid
20,000,000	£10,000,000	Ordinary Shares	10,000,002
			Nominal Value
			£5,000,001

The subscription lists for the Shares, all of which are being offered to the public under the Offers, will open at 10.00am on 5 February 1998 and may be closed at any time thereafter but in any event not later than 10.00am on 2 April 1998 unless extended prior to that date.

A prospectus (including an Application Form) in relation to the Company has been published and copies will be made available for collection during normal business hours for a period of two business days from the date hereof from the Company Announcements Office, the London Stock Exchange, the London Stock Exchange Tower, Old Broad Street, London EC2N 1HP and on any weekday (Saturdays excepted) from the date hereof up to and including 29 May 1998 from:

Bell Lawrie White & Co
(a division of Brewin Dolphin Bell Lawrie Limited)
48 St Vincent Street
Glasgow G2 5TS

Close Brothers Investment Limited
98 Great St Helens
London EC3A 6AP

4 February 1998

24/UNIT TRUSTS

[illegible][illegible]

England refus

هَكَذَا مِنْ الْأَصْلِ

Guscott still showing no signs of mortality

Jeremy Guscott dismisses the extraordinary level of interest generated by his return to England colours as "weird", but mere mortals remain astonished by his powers of recovery. As Chris Hewett reports, Guscott's appearance against France in Paris on Saturday marks the high point of his achievement.

It was Andy Robinson, the Bath coach and a long-time playing colleague of Jeremy Guscott's, who hit the nail on the head. Asked to assess the risk involved in selecting the celebrated Prince of Centres for last weekend's Heineken Cup final on the strength of one match in six and a half months, Robbo responded: "Risk? What risk? There's no risk in selecting a player of Jerry's ability."

"OK," replied a persistent inquirer. "How many players are blessed with such ability?" Robinson narrowed his eyes, stared at his questioner as though he was completely barking and turned away to talk to someone with a handle on reality. It was an understandable reaction: no one who has played either with or against Guscott these last dozen years or so would have considered an answer necessary.

Trillions of words have been penned on the subject of Guscott's unique contribution to British three-quarter play since his England debut in 1989, a fair percentage of them in the wake of his two great Test-winning strikes for the Lions—the kick-and-gather try in Brisbane on his first tour nine years ago and the last-minute drop goal that beat the Springboks in Durban last June.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that Clive Woodward's de-

FIVE NATIONS COUNTDOWN

cision to run his favourite centre at the Stade de France on Saturday on the strength of approximately three hours of rugby constitutes a new high-water mark. Guscott's last Test appearance, against South Africa in Johannesburg in July, cost him a broken arm and when he subsequently picked up some serious damage to a disc in his lower back during rehabilitative training with Bath last September, the game appeared to be up.

Many of his closest club colleagues expected him to call it quits. He was 32, surgery was required and, anyway, he had done it all unprepared times over. He had played for the Lions in every major rugby stronghold in the southern hemisphere, he had appeared in a World Cup final, he had won Grand Slams and Triple Crowns by the sackload and had pocketed more domestic league and cup final medals than he knew what to do with.

Those colleagues were wrong. "I'm a rugby player and I play because I love the game," Guscott said this week. "Why would I want to retire now? We've got a World Cup to think about next year and while there is a chance of being part of the England squad, I'm focusing on playing on at the best level I can."

All the same, it is difficult to think of another player anywhere in the world who would be thrown into what is certain to be an extreme physical and psychological trial in such unpropitious circumstances. Guscott loves playing in Paris, but a France-England Test is no one's idea of a garden party.

"Look, I've played two full games since coming back, the first of which I ended up losing, the second of which was the greatest day in my club's histo-

ry. I'm enjoying my rugby and helping Bath beat Brive has put my confidence levels on a high.

"If the atmosphere in Bordeaux was anything to go by, the French are crazy for rugby at the moment. It will be spine-tingling over there. If you add to that the fact that England are playing some pretty expansive stuff at the moment, you could say I'm looking forward to this weekend."

"But I must say I find a lot of the attention coming my way a bit on the weird side. I'm one player in an exciting squad focused on the big games coming up and nothing else has any relevance. My only goal after the operation was to recover some health and fitness and play for Bath. To get picked for England now was not something I expected, but I'm chuffed to bits to be involved again."

It now seems certain that Guscott, who wins his 49th England cap in Paris, will realise one of the few tangible ambitions left to him: membership of the exclusive Red Rose 50 Club. Only seven players have hung in there long enough to gain admission and all of them—Rory Underwood, Will Carling, Rob Andrew, Brian Moore, Peter Winterbottom, Wade Dooley and Jason Leonard—experienced Guscott's genius at first hand. Indeed, they all played against Australia in the 1991 World Cup final.

Guscott and Leonard are the only components of that side still plying their trade at the most rarified level, although Andrew and Underwood remain active in the Allied Dunbar Premiership. It will be no surprise to discover the "JJs"—Jerry and Jason, both educated at state comprehensives, both renowned as players' players—in a quiet corner of some bar in the Rue de la Madeleine on Saturday night. After all, they have almost as much to look forward to as they have in common.



Touch of genius: Jeremy Guscott is welcomed back into the England fold by Jason Leonard during Monday's training session at Twickenham. Photograph: Peter Jay

Vickery awaits the call to show some true Cornish grit

England's reputation for domination in the front row has been in decline, but Phil Vickery, called up to the England squad yesterday, is a rugged young player with the physical presence to put that right. Chris Hewett reports.

Britain's farmers are not the only section of the workforce with a beef crisis on their hands—the same can be said of England's prop population, who once bestrode the world with their "best of breed" certificates but are now mocked as mere runts of the litter.

As recently as the 1995 World Cup, the New Zealand All Blacks were so petrified of the white-shirted muscle awaiting them in Cape Town that they based their entire game plan on avoiding forward contact. Nowadays, they happily take all the contact they can find. English scrummaging is in decline.

There is hope, however, and Phil Vickery, a 21-year-old K2 of a light-head currently learning his hard, unforgiving but hugely influential trade at the

front row academy otherwise known as Kingsholm. The Gloucester faithful are fiercely proud of their international props—the Burtons, the Blakeways, the Preedys, the Sargents—and, if the tough-nut intelligentsia who frequent the Kingsholm Shed have their way, Vickery will continue the grand tradition sooner rather than later.

Born in Barnstaple but raised on a mixed farm in the Cornish village of Kilhampton, near Bude, he knows all about tradition. The Cornish take no lessons from anyone—not even the Cherry and Whites of Gloucester—in the serious business of propping and, although Vickery's formidable 6ft 3in, 20st frame allowed him to play some schoolboy rugby at both lock and No 8, he opted for life at the sharp end at 15.

"Cornwall is not the sort of place where things happen quickly, but if you can play rugby you find yourself going up the ladder at a rare old pace," he recalled. "Almost as soon as I started propping I found myself in the representative whirl—trials here, trials there, trials somewhere else—and, after switching clubs from Bude to Redruth, I was picked for a first-team game at Leeds at 17,

which was quite an experience, one way or another.

"I made the England 16 Group and then England Colts, joining them for a tour of Canada. A few Gloucester boys were on the same trip, including Phil Greening, Trevor Woodman and Ed Pearce. I got on partic-



Vickery: England call-up

ularly well with Phil and at the end of the 1995 season I popped up to Kingsholm to watch him play against Brian Moore in an important match with Harlequins. There was a great atmosphere that day and I loved every minute of it, so I thought I'd give it a go there."

Since then Vickery has been exposed to the stresses and strains of life among the grown-ups and survived to tell the tale. His two matches for different England second-strings against

the midweek All Blacks were particularly instructive—"I played against Bull Allen on both occasions and found him, well, pretty strong, really"—and he is now firmly in Woodward's plans.

"They're all good operators, those New Zealanders. They are always at you, always trying to put something on you and I think I learned more in that 160 minutes than in God knows how many domestic matches. The All Blacks are not fancy, quite the reverse. They are simple, direct and they do things properly. There is no let-up and, if you do something wrong yourself, you are always punished for it."

"I can't tell you how delighted I was to get a run in those two games. It meant someone in the set-up liked me and that was important, the sort of recognition that made the move from Cornwall, all the upheaval that comes from a change of scenery and change of lifestyle, worthwhile."

"In many ways, though, my heart is still in Cornwall; my family are there and I love Redruth as a club. They are proud of their rugby down there and it's heart-breaking that so many talented young players seem to be si-

phoned out of the county as soon as they reach college age. Sadly, there just aren't enough things happening, either academically or rugby-wise, to keep players within the borders."

For all his rapid development, Vickery still needs to apply the sandpaper to the odd rough edge. "He's good, no doubt about that," Gareth Chilcott, the former England and Lions prop who now heads up the marketing at Kingsholm, said. "But there's no point asking too much of him too early. He needs to settle down for the rest of this season, learn from his elders and betters and then really turn it on in September. That's when England should start pushing him."

If props mature later than most other forwards, Vickery has all the time in the world, especially as he possesses the particular kind of raw strength that comes from working on the land rather than working out in the gym. Two decades ago, Stack Stevens prop Cornish front-row player on the England map with some international performances that made Land's End look flimsy and fragile. If his successor is made of the same stuff, the red rose pack may just find its feet once again.

Paris pitch no better

The fate of Saturday's France-England international still hung in the balance last night. Officials reported no improvement in the frozen and troublesome pitch at the new Stade de France just north of Paris.

The turf was reported to be frozen to a depth of 10 centimetres—more than was admitted the previous day—despite a pitch cover installed on Monday night. Warm air blowers are to be employed today, but stadium officials were also praying for a change in the weather.

It became clear yesterday that the stadium had deliberately not covered or warmed the pitch at the weekend, for fear that artificial protection or forced heating would worsen its fragile condition.

The daily sports newspaper *L'Equipe* said a more aggressive approach would have been adopted if the stadium were not due to be the showpiece of the football World Cup in June. *L'Equipe* said the stadium was left with the choice of risking a frozen pitch for the opening match of the Five Nations Championship, or providing a "ploughed field" for the World Cup opener on 10 June.

—John Lichfield, Paris

Scottish curlers can give Britain medal facelift

Winning Olympic medals is something that Britain has not been good at lately. Now four patriotic Scotsmen are threatening to end an infamous run—at the Winter Olympics to boot. Mike Rowbottom on an ambitious quartet.

Britain, as the British Olympic Association has been careful to point out in recent weeks, is not a winter sports country.

With the XVIII Winter Olympics getting underway in Nagano on Saturday, the official line on British medal possibilities has been deliberately downbeat. Outraged domestic reaction at a lack of success in the summer Games of 1996 is still fresh in many administrative minds.

Against that background, the jaunty confidence of the British curling team—four Scotsmen led by Flight Lieutenant Dougie Dryburgh—stands in startling contrast.

In December, they regarded the bronze medal they won at the European Championships, where they defeated the previous world champions, Sweden, in the third-place play-off, as a disappointment.

The narrowest of defeats in the semi-final by Germany, who went on to win the gold, ranked with the Scottish team, which managed a measure of revenge by beating the Germans at skip Dougie Dryburgh's Perth last month.

They are not gun ho—but nor are they travelling all the way to Japan with the hope of anything less than an Olympic title.

"We are after the gold medal in Nagano or it is failure for us," said Dryburgh's colleague, Peter Wilson, a pharmaceutical salesman whose brother, Philip, a farmer from Stranraer, is also in the team. Ronnie Napier, a construction engineer, makes up the four.



Ronnie Napier (left) and skip Dougie Dryburgh

Dryburgh himself assesses the situation as follows: Canada favourites, and Scotland among five second favourites, the others being Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway.

Curling was featured at the first winter Olympics of 1924 in Chamonix, although its official status then is in doubt. It has been a demonstration sport at the Games in 1932, '36, '64, '88 and '92. Why it has taken so long to arrive officially is a mystery to Dryburgh.

"I can't understand it," he said. "It's not like some of the newer Olympic sports which have a subjective judging element in them, like freestyle skiing or synchronised swimming."

As a Scotsman, he could be forgiven for a trace of bias. After all, the game is believed to have had its origins in his country—although there is no certainty about it. A Scottish curling stone inscribed with the date 1511 stands as powerful circumstantial evidence.

And many of the stones which will be used in Nagano—40lb a time, including the handles—will have been hewn from Scottish granite. Ailsa

Craig has an important part to play in the Winter Olympics. Although the game and the stones may be Scottish, the four Scotsmen selected have to remember that, for the duration of Olympics at least, they are British. They are coming round to it.

"We are all very patriotic Scotsmen, and we find it strange to be representing Great Britain for the first time in our lives," Dryburgh said. "I probably find the position easiest to come to terms with because as a member of the Royal Air Force, my boss is the Queen."

Dryburgh, who was 32 on Friday, comes from a sporting family. His 22-year-old youngest brother, James, is Scotland's first professional curler who has twice been world junior champion and is a reserve for the Olympic team. Another brother, Stewart, is also a top flight curler, and sister Carolyn, has been five-times Inter-Services skating champion.

The sporting genes have been passed down by mother Jackie, who was runner-up in the pairs at the World Professional Skating Championships, and father Jack, who was Britain's leading ice hockey scorer for four years during the 1960s, revelling in the sobriquet of "The Pimpster".

Dryburgh, who is due to be promoted to Squadron Leader on his return from Nagano, is a training officer who directs the work of flight engineers. "I am not an active flyer because of bad eyesight," he said. He is, however, clearly perfectly adapted for the acute observation he requires as skip for his team, a role which requires him to call all the shots, as well as delivering the final, crucial shot himself.

The sport which has similarities to bowls, in that points are scored by the number of stones you can leave closer to a central point than your opponents'. Rather than a jack, curling has the "house", a circle of six feet radius.

The term "curling" comes from the varieties of spin which players impart to the stone via the handle. While Dryburgh stands near the "house", directing each delivery, the two other members of the team take up their synthetic brooms and—as required—sweep the ice in front of the travelling stone to speed its progress.

"In golf they say, 'never up, never in'," Dryburgh points out. "But it's the reverse in curling. If you deliver the stone too heavy, there's nothing you can do about it. The idea is to deliver it just a bit light, so you can speed it up by brushing in front of it."

But the golfing analogy holds true in one respect—Dryburgh has to read the ice like a green by noting the behaviour of the stone in transit.

"Sometimes the ice is warped and you can't see it. But the stones are so well balanced, they react to the smallest variations," he said.

He then uses his mental map of the landscape, backwards and forwards, to direct the tactics and employ the sweepers at the right times.

WEEKEND FIXTURES AND POOLS FORECAST

FA Carling Premiership	
1 Barnsley v Everton	2
2 Blackburn v Tottenham	1
3 Coventry v Sheffield Wednesday	1
4 Derby County v Aston Villa	1
5 Leicester v Leeds	1
6 Liverpool v Southampton	1
7 Manchester Utd v Bolton	1
8 Newcastle v West Ham	1
Sunday: Arsenal v Chelsea, Monday: Crystal Palace v Wimbledon	
Nationwide Football League	
First Division	
9 Birmingham v Middlesbrough	2
10 Bradford City v Charlton	2
11 Bury v Port Vale	1
12 Huddersfield v Stockport	1
13 Norwich v Manchester City	1
14 Portsmouth v Nottm Forest	1
15 QPR v Grimsby	1
16 Reading v Tranmere	1
17 Sheffield Utd v Oxford Utd	1
18 Stoke v Ipswich	1
19 Swindon v West Bromwich	1
20 Wolves v Sunderland	1
Second Division	
21 Bournemouth v Bristol City	2
22 Bristol Rovers v Chesterfield	1
23 Fulham v Southend	1
24 Millwall v Gillingham	1
25 Oldham v Blackpool	1
26 Plymouth v Carlisle	1
27 Preston v Burnley	1
28 Wigan v Northampton	1
29 Wrexham v Luton	1
30 Wycombe v Brentford	1
31 York v Walsley	1
Sunday: Watford v Gillingham	
Third Division	
32 Brighton v Torquay	2
33 Cambridge Utd v Doncaster	1
34 Cardiff v Lincoln City	1
35 Chester v Mansfield	1
36 Hartlepool v Darlington	1
37 Hull City v Rochdale	1
38 Macclesfield v Scarborough	1
39 Notts County v Shrewsbury	1
Also playing (not on computer): Northampton v Exeter, Scunthorpe v Barnsley, Plymouth Colchester v Swans, Leyton Orient v Peterborough	
Bell's Scottish League	
Premier Division	
40 Aberdeen v Hibernian	1
41 Dundee Utd v Motherwell	1
42 Kilmarnock v St Johnstone	1
43 Rangers v Dunfermline	1
Sunday: Hearts v Celtic	
First Division	
44 Albion v Hamilton	1
45 Falkirk v Morton	1
46 Raith v Partick	1
47 St Mirren v Ayr	1
48 Stranraer v Dundee	2
Second Division	
49 Brechin v East Fife	2
Also playing (not on computer): Inverness CT v Dornie, Livingston v Forfar, Queen of the South v Clyde, Stirling Albion v Arbroath, Third Division: Albion Rovers v East Stirling, Alloa v Queen's Park, Cowdenbeath v Arbroath, Dunfermline v Ross County, Montrose v Breich, Four Grasses: Leven v Leven, Wick v Wick, Dundee United v Dundee, Forfar v Forfar, Perth v Perth, Perth v Perth, Perth v Perth	
Five leagues: Middlesbrough, Nottingham Forest, Brentford City, Torquay, East Fife	
Ten teams: Blackburn, Liverpool, Manchester United, Norwich, Bristol Rovers, Rotherham, Cambridge Utd, Notts County, Aberdeen, Rangers	

Armstrong takes over Scotland captaincy

Gary Armstrong, the Newcastle scrum-half, will take over the captaincy from Rob Wainwright for Scotland's opening Five Nations' Championship match against Ireland in Dublin on Saturday.

Wainwright does retain his place at blind-side flanker in a side showing seven changes—three positional—from the one defeated in Italy last month.

Recalled to the starting XV are the Wasps winger Kenny Logan, who was left out of the squad for the trip to Treviso, and his club colleague Damian Cronin in the second row.

Cronin replaces the inexperienced Scott Murray, while Logan starts on the left flank with Craig Joiner switching to the right in place of Tony Stanger, who is demoted to the replacements' bench.

Newcastle prop George Graham also makes a belated first start at international level

after being forced to withdraw from the original team to face Italy, coming in for David Hixon at loose-head who is also dropped to the bench.

The other main positional switch sees Craig Chalmers restored to the vital stand-off role in a straight swap for Gregor Townsend, who reverts to the centre role he has filled for most of the season with his club, Northampton.

The selectors have also gone for a more heavyweight No 8 in Newcastle's Peter Walton. He gets the nod over Adam Roxburgh, who will be joined on the bench by London Scottish full-back Derrick Lee after a long absence from the international scene.

Tight-head prop Paul Wallace has received the green light to play for Ireland. Wallace had been struggling with a neck injury sustained playing for Saracens last weekend. He will

be joined in the Irish side by flanker David Corkery and centre Kevin Maggs.

SCOTLAND (v Ireland, Five Nations' Championship, Dublin, Saturday): R Shupland (Rotherham and Colchester), C Joiner (Leicester), A Tait (Newcastle), G Townsend (Northampton), K Logan (Wasps), C Chalmers (Milton Keynes Dons), G Graham (Newcastle), G Bullock (Wid. of Scotland and Glasgow), M Stanger (Northampton), D Cronin (Wasps), P Walton (Newcastle), S Holmes (London Scottish), R Wainwright (London Scottish), C Joiner (Leicester), A Tait (Newcastle), G Townsend (Northampton), K Logan (Wasps), C Chalmers (Milton Keynes Dons), G Graham (Newcastle), G Bullock (Wid. of Scotland and Glasgow), M Stanger (Northampton), D Cronin (Wasps), P Walton (Newcastle), S Holmes (London Scottish), R Wainwright (London Scottish).

Referee: A Watson (SA). Touch judges: C Thomas (Wid) and E Morrison (Glas).

● Bristol have signed the Neath winger Chris Higgs on a free transfer. The 22-year-old poleman was not under contract at the Welsh club and he will make his debut in the Cheltenham and Gloucester Cup game at Moseley tonight. Higgs was set to move to the Memorial Ground in December, but was persuaded by the Welsh club to stay at The Gnuil.

SKI HOTLINE

Latest snow and weather reports from 200+ resorts in Europe and North America.

Voice reports 0891 333 100 + code
Fax reports 0897 500 086 + code

For a full list of all ski codes by voice or fax dial 0990 100 843

Ski Snapshot

At a glance to snow conditions at over 200 resorts world-wide
0897 500 601

in association with
NEWTEL
INTERNET

Calls to 0891 numbers cost 50p/min; to 08975 numbers £1/min at all times. Helpline 0990 133 345

SNOW REPORTS

Resort	Comment	Area open	Last snow	Last up	Forecast
ANDORRA					
Val d'Aran	Best snow on highest peaks	100%	26.1	60	Cloudy
AUSTRIA					
Innsbruck	Packed powder snow high up	100%	31.1	80	More snow
BULGARIA					
Veliko Tarnovo	Packed and groomed conditions	100%	1.2	40	Snow down
CANADA					
Whistler	Good thing on dry packed snow	90%	2.1	150	Bright
FRANCE					
Chamonix	All sectors looking good	100%	30.1	80	Bright sunny
GERMANY					
Garmisch	All four sectors fully open	100%	19.1	30	Dry, clear, cold
ITALY					
Cortina	Firm packed snow	80%	5.1	70	Clear sunny
ROMANIA					
Poiana Brasov	Firm packed snow	100%	3.1	50	Cloudy
SPAIN					
Sierra Nevada	Firm packed snow cover	95%	26.1	45	Snow down
SWITZERLAND					
Saas	Fresh snow on surface	90%	1.2	70	Sunny
US					
Aspen	Good snow throughout	100%	22.1	30	Sunny
UNITED STATES					
Heavenly	Firm powder snow on firm base	100%	1.2	60	Clear

Snow Reports supplied by Ski Hotline

the waste from demon-
tors to control matches.

Jockey Club climbs down over suspensions

The three jockeys questioned, but not charged, by police last week and then suspended by the Jockey Club will be allowed to ride from tomorrow following a volte-face by racing's disciplinary body. Richard Edmondson reports.

When banning Jamie Osborne, Dean Gallagher and Leighton Aspell last week, racing's investigative force announced a meeting for today "when the jockeys will have an opportunity

to make any further representations as to why that suspension should not be continued for a longer period". In the event, there will be no explanation required and the trio will simply have their licences returned at Portman Square.

The Jockey Club's reason for its reversal of attitude is simple: they asked people. Or in mandarin-speak they took "soundings within the industry". There will, however, be no official apology. The Jockey Club maintains it acted correctly to maintain public confidence.

The only panic, though, was at the Jockey Club itself. Punters still turned out this week

(figures from bookmakers and the Tote actually show an increase in turnover). The weighing room was no Bastille for frustrated backers.

Christopher Foster, the Jockey Club's executive director, said yesterday: "The Licensing Committee still requires the jockeys to attend [today's meeting] because it wishes there to be no room for doubt as to why the Committee suspended the licences in the first place." This is just as well as the space remains as large as ever.

"Not only has it been a difficult week for the jockeys, but also highly confusing," Michael Caulfield, the secretary to the

Jockeys' Association, said yesterday. "The behaviour of the Jockey Club has been curious to say the least and we look forward to our meeting with them tomorrow. It will be a unique feeling to go to the Jockey Club already knowing the result."

"If it had not been for the representations made by the jockeys' solicitors, the three riders may, I believe, have been suspended until 29 April or beyond. I am terribly aware of the seriousness of the past week's events, but the Jockey Club did not apply natural justice and this had to be challenged."

Andrew Chalk, Osborne's solicitor, said: "I would like to

make it clear that the decision to hold a further meeting tomorrow resulted from vigorous representations made by the jockeys' solicitors. At the outset, the Committee gave no indication they were considering suspensions on a short-term basis."

"The Committee did not inform us that they would be taking soundings of the industry to assess the risk to public confidence in horseracing and it is surprising that this was not made clear to us."

"We were told that we could return on 4 February so that we could make further representations as to why the suspensions should not be continued for a

longer period". That appeared to put the onus on us to show good reasons why the licences should be reinstated."

It is the residual effect of the last week that most bothers the jockeys and their supporters. "The loss of character is more of a problem than loss of earnings," Graeme James, Aspell's agent, said. "To the public it's something that won't go away in a hurry and he'll be remembered for some time as being one of the 'weighing-room three'."

The conditional (apprentice) jockey's main trainer, Josh Gifford, added: "I would like an explanation from the Jockey Club. Leighton is a conditional jock-

ey] and I'm meant to be responsible for him. It's an absolute joke. They've got themselves in a bloody great hole and now they can't get out of it."

Aspell is likely to be the first of the three back in action. "This week has been very stressful for me and my family," he said. "I am very relieved to have my licence returned and am looking forward to getting back on to the racecourse where I can concentrate on winning races."

That opportunity may come tomorrow on Gifford's New Rising at Towcester. It will be a significant moment in a case which has hardly highlighted the Jockey Club's capabilities.

Drama goes on as Yates awaits verdict

Kevin Yates, the Bath prop accused of biting Simon Fenn's ear, yesterday faced a Rugby Football Union disciplinary panel at Twickenham. Chris Hewett reports.

The sorry story of Simon Fenn's ear was turning into a saga of Homeric proportions yesterday as Kevin Yates turned up at Twickenham to answer allegations of ear-biting. When the highly rated 26-year-old prop was summoned to face the music he could hardly have expected it to drag on like a Wagner opera, but as darkness fell over south-west London last night there was still no sign of an end to his ordeal.

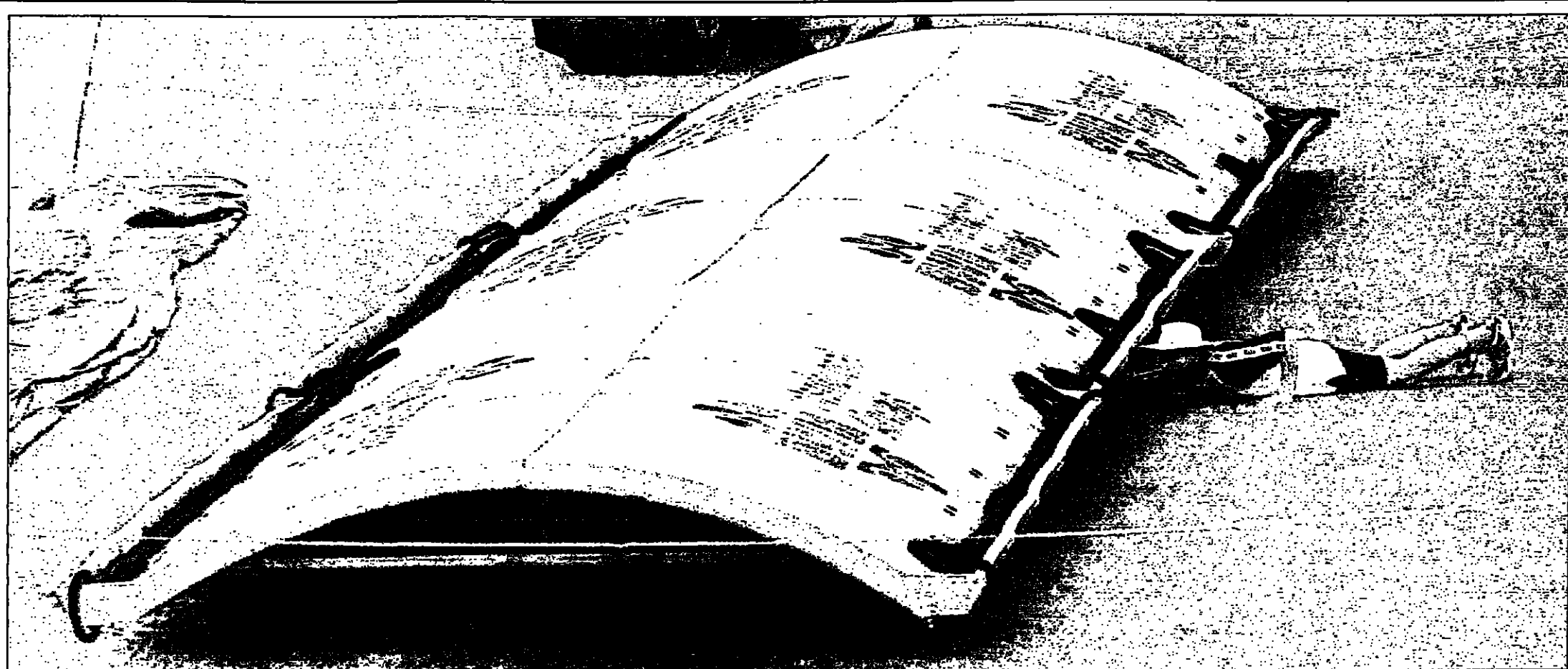
The proceedings, chaired by Michael Burton QC in the company of two Rugby Football Union management board members, Jonathan Dance and Brian Baister, began at 9.30 in the morning. Yates and Fenn, the London Scottish flanker he was accused of assaulting, were there from the off, as were the rest of the Bath pack who played in the fateful Tetley's Bitter Cup match at the Rec on 10 January.

After nine hours of considering medical evidence, hearing witness statements and conducting cross-examinations, the panel were a "long way short of a verdict", in the words of Richard Prescott, the RFU director of communications. "The hearing went straight through lunch," he added, to eliminate any suspicion that the union was conducting this piece of business over the traditional three courses and lashings of gin and tonic.

One Bath player, Federico Mendez, flew in from Spain to be there. The Argentinian hooker was one of three players, including Yates and his fellow prop, Victor Ubogu, originally cited by the Ediles. Like other witnesses he filed a written account of events as well as making a personal appearance.

After intense pressure from London Scottish, who paraded Fenn before the press and television cameras 48 hours after the match, Bath suspended Yates on full pay on 13 January. He missed the Heineken Cup final with Brive and a number of England squad sessions, from which he withdrew on diplomatic grounds. He would almost certainly have been named in England's party for this weekend's Five Nations match against the French in Paris.

The likely outcome last night was an adjournment, either to today or next week. If Yates, who has always protested his innocence, was less than amused by the protracted agony of uncertainty, the tribunal members were acutely aware of the legal consequences of getting it wrong. Who said rugby was only a game?



Undercover investigation: Michael Atherton tries to get the low-down on the pitch yesterday for the first of the back-to-back Tests in Port of Spain, Trinidad

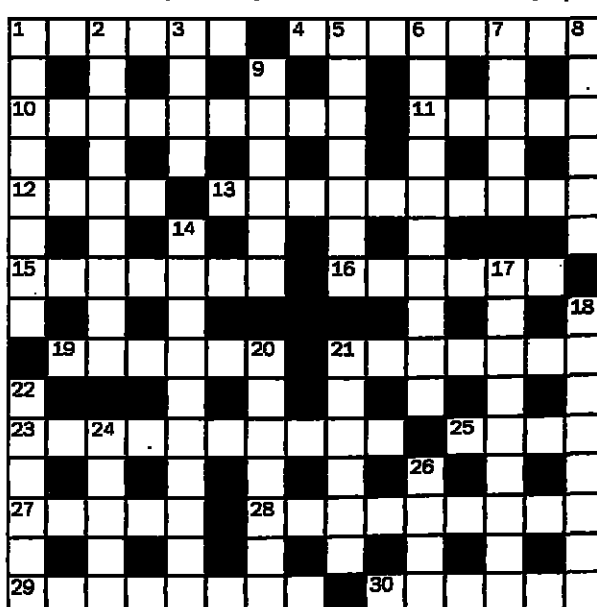
Photograph: David Ashdown

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3525, Wednesday 4 February

By Aquila

Today's Solution



GRUESOME
UNUSUAL
FACETIOUS
ARTICLE
WONDER
LAW
OWLET
GUNBOAT
SASSY
HISTORIC
OAM
WILLER
TENSE
DEUR

ACROSS

- 1 Ena, a mad sort of woman (6)
- 4 Do its sufferers call house-doctors? (8)
- 10 Epistoler in Minnesota (5,4)
- 11 What is the value of a poet lost for words? (5)
- 12 Bird among the faster, head-burying sort (4)
- 13 Rise and set off for drive (3-2-3-2)
- 15 Broken promise of a paid part-timer (7)
- 16 Spies aim in spectacles (6)
- 19 Spies following a Manx cat in tropical shrub (6)
- 21 Excitable bloke is getting the needle (7)
- 23 Loose tie on a principal teacher in college (10)

DOWN

- 25 Monkhood, say, that has a function on a chimney (4)
- 27 Excited cry of woman receiving ring (5)
- 28 Weapon giving most trouble in disarmament programme? (9)
- 29 Gaunt and tall? Seek treatment! (8)
- 30 Compensation whilst not actually firing? (6)
- 1 Suspicion of corrosion after condensation (8)
- 2 Rash around head of radius is affecting outer skin (9)
- 3 Wine taken in feasting (4)
- 5 Hitches in traffic jams (7)
- 6 Fawn Legend, all singing all dancing production (10)
- 7 Drawn by siren leeward, say the sailors (5)

- 8 St Michael's church in Oslo, possibly (6)
- 9 Stare at boy endlessly in summerhouse (6)
- 14 Coy appeals put out in event of great importance (10)
- 17 They rest on a bridge, looking over three fields (9)
- 18 Dawn, perhaps, seen through a transom (8)
- 20 One leaving NW African republic and getting a B in maths (7)
- 21 Work? Not I, anyway — given alternative (6)
- 22 Produces singular books (6)
- 24 Lightweight individual taking traditional sea-air (5)
- 26 Worker loud in complaint (4)

FOOTBALL

Italians renew commitment to Chelsea

Gianfranco Zola and Roberto Di Matteo have both signed two-year extensions to their contracts at Chelsea.

Zola has committed himself to the club until 2002, taking him to the age of 35, while Di Matteo also signed a similar contract extension taking him to the age of 31, the club revealed yesterday. Their promising 20-year-old midfielder Mark Nicholls has also extended his contract.

Chelsea have also been linked with the Rangers striker Brian Laudrup, whose contract runs out this summer. His agent was reported to have held talks at Stamford Bridge last weekend, and the Dane is expected to choose between Chelsea and Ajax.

Portsmouth will discover in 10 days' time what action they

will face from the Football Association after the assistant referee, Edward Martin, was attacked by a Sheffield United supporter during the 1-1 draw on Saturday.

The FA launched an inquiry following the incident at Fratton Park, when Martin was knocked unconscious. David Davies, the FA spokesman, confirmed yesterday they will wait for the report of the referee, Mark Halsey, before deciding what action to take.

Meanwhile, Pompey have abandoned their attempt to sign the Australian international goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac following a sixth-month legal wrangle over the Department of Employment's refusal to issue a work permit.

Sheffield Wednesday are also at the mercy of the DoE —

their hopes of signing the Polish defender Pawel Wojtala on loan from Hamburg hinge on the success of their application for a work permit.

Wednesday have agreed to pay Hamburg an initial fee of £60,000 plus an additional £20,000 for each appearance the 25-year-old makes during the loan period that extends until the end of the season.

The Premiership club have also agreed a fee of £800,000, should they decide to sign him permanently in the summer.

Manchester City could have a third Georgian in their side on Saturday after finally receiving a work permit for Kakhaber Tskhadadze, after beating Liverpool to sign the Alanis Vaidakvaz defender.

George Graham, the Leeds manager, has denied rumours

linking him with a £3m move for Portugal's leading scorer Nuno Gomes, and a possible swap deal involving Rod Wallace.

"I was at Benfica on Sunday, but I was actually watching a player from Setubal," Graham said. "So there's no truth in the story linking myself with Gomes. I have not made a bid for him and I have also not received an offer for Wallace from Benfica."

Newcastle have signed Aberdeen's Scotland Under-21 midfielder Stephen Glass on a pre-contract agreement. Glass travelled to Tyneside for talks yesterday to tie up a deal, after playing in Monday's 3-1 defeat at Celtic. Aberdeen rate the 21-year-old at £1.5m, although the Magpies would prefer to pay around £500,000.

BSkyB writ, page 21

Gascoigne awaits SFA verdict over Old Firm flute antics

Paul Gascoigne will discover today if he is to face disciplinary action by the Scottish Football Association over his controversial flute-playing gesture at the New Old Firm game.

The England midfielder has already been fined £20,000 by Rangers and has issued a formal public apology after imitating a flute-player while warming up for the match on 2 January at Parkhead.

Regarded as an inflammatory gesture, the incident brought protests from the Celtic board, as well as their fans, and it will be discussed by the SFA's executive committee today. Gascoigne will not be appearing in person but will receive written notification of any punishment.

Published by Newspaper Publishing PLC, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, and printed at Mirror Colour Print, St Albans Road, Watford and Hollinwood Avenue, Oldham. Back issues available from Historic Newspapers, 01988 840370.

David Findlay, the SFA spokesman, said: "There have been a variety of letters received following an incident at the Old Firm match."

"The committee will discuss the matter relative to the player's actions and if they determine it is necessary to take the matter further they would wish

to inform the parties concerned first before making any public statement."

Gascoigne is currently battling to regain full fitness in time for Rangers' game with Dunfermline at Ibrox on Saturday, after appearing as a substitute in their weekend defeat by St Johnstone.

When you're expected to work anywhere, anytime, why expect less of your bank?

Time's too precious to spend it queuing at a bank. With free 24-hour access to your account worldwide, we can work whenever you do. Call us anytime on 0800 00 43 00 or visit our website at <http://www.citibank.co.uk> to find out more. Quote ref PINDAC and we'll fly you to Amsterdam and back for free* when you open a Citibank Account.

Subject to the purchase of a return ticket and travel insurance. Full terms and conditions available on request. Citibank International plc. Registered office: 316 Strand, London WC2R 1PH. Ultimate owner: Citicorp New York, USA.

THE CITY NEVER SLEEPS

CITIBANK

هنا من الأصل